

Of course, the overall determination of textual cohesion is how well your introduction and conclusion reiterate the same thesis or line of argument. Your introduction sets out what you intend to argue, your conclusion – in part – summarises what you have just argued, so there should be a high degree of correlation!

Length

How much should you write? This is not really a valuable question. No marker will be counting words or pages and allocating you a mark for length. You must write coherently and succinctly, and with adequate explanation and supporting evidence for your ideas.

Past Examination Reports made a specific note that many candidates wrote long, rambling responses, trying to display everything they knew rather than just what was relevant to the question. An essay which answers the question explicitly and which displays understanding of relevant course concepts is what is actually required and will be rewarded the most highly. However, writing an essay that only discusses one or two points will not demonstrate your mastery of your texts or the course. There is really no need to ask how much you ought to write. Write what you need to in order to address the question to the best of your ability.

Spelling and grammar

Markers understand that your exam responses are essentially a first draft and, as such, minor spelling, punctuation and grammar errors are overlooked. However, as we have discussed earlier, your written expression contributes significantly to your mark, particularly in the extent to which it enhances or impedes your argument. It is essential that you spend time proofreading your work after you have written it. Often our brain moves faster than our hands and what you actually wrote down is not quite what was in your head! As you proofread, check that:

- each sentence makes sense
- each sentence logically builds on the previous one
- your spelling is generally correct – particularly syllabus terms, text details and question keywords
- your punctuation is generally correct
- you have stayed focused on the question
- you have included, and explained, sufficient textual evidence
- you have used the most appropriate terminology.

A word on punctuating titles

Markers expect you to use appropriate titling conventions when referring to your texts. Traditionally, in handwritten essays, the following applies:

- Long works (novels, plays, anthologies) are underlined.
- Short works (individual poems, short stories, articles) are in 'inverted commas'.

Using textual evidence

Summarising your text

While it can be useful to provide a brief overview of your text to contextualise your response, this should be no more than a sentence or two, at most. After all, you will get few marks for mere plot recall. This is something you can craft and memorise prior to the exam.

For example:

The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopian novel in which a conservative, theocratic republic has been established in the former USA. In a society where fertility is commodified following mass sterility, the protagonist Offred has to adjust to her shocking new life as a reproductive slave for the elite.

Using quotes as evidence

Avoid lengthy descriptions from the text via long quotations or exhaustive paraphrasing of the plotline. References to, and quotations from, the text should only be used to support your analysis and not as extra padding to fill out an answer. Quotes should be succinct and highly selective; don't include entire lengths of textual evidence if you all need is a particular phrase.

For example, many students write passages such as:

Atwood conveys that the abrupt and significant changes in Offred's world have created a crisis of identity. This is shown in the following quote: "I know where I am, and who, and what day it is. These are the tests and I am sane. Sanity is a valuable possession; I hoard it the way people once hoarded money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes."

This is unnecessary, as the following abbreviated version reveals:

Atwood conveys that the abrupt and significant changes in Offred's world have created a crisis of identity, one where sanity has become "a valuable possession." Like "the way people once hoarded money," Offred saves hers so she "will have enough, when the time comes."

This conciseness then provides the time and space for students to develop the quality and depth of their response, digging deeper and providing more detail.

Too often, though, students include quotes as if they are self-evident of the point they are making. This is not acceptable. You know from your own study that there are many ways to interpret even a single sentence of a text. You must explain – using appropriate metalanguage – the significance of the evidence in terms of your argument. You should always reflect on whether you have fully explained the point or evidence presented. That is your job as a student. To leave the marker to assume why the quote you have provided is evidence of your point will get you nowhere and potentially even hinder your response if the marker has a different interpretation.

For example, many students write sentences such as:

This quote shows how women are marginalised within the novel.

Actually, it doesn't. It is your *explanation* of the quote that might show how women are marginalised in the text, but the quote alone will not.

As a general rule, **quotations should be brief**. Use them to support or explain an argument or point. Don't throw them in for the sake of it. Present detailed, specific evidence and fully explain the relevance of this evidence. Do not make the evidence too general or unclear, because you need to demonstrate your knowledge of the text.

A bad habit of many students is to just drop a quote into the middle of a sentence. Whenever you include a quote, your own **grammar needs to be preserved**. Your quote must be integrated in a fashion that results in a grammatically correct and fluent sentence. Sometimes this means you need to manipulate your sentence to integrate the quote correctly.

For example:

Connie feels Mrs Bolton "was thrilled to a weird passion" regarding her education at the hands of Clifford, "a man of the upper classes." Taking the woman under his wing gave Clifford, a member of the gentry, "a sense of power." Observing this, Connie understands "all that made them upper class": that is, the entitlement and authority, in addition to "the money."

Sometimes, and only if absolutely necessary, you can **use ellipses and square brackets** to manipulate your quotes. An ellipsis reveals that you have omitted some words, whereas square brackets are used to alter a word within a quote, such as to change its tense or substitute a proper noun for a pronoun. You should never change the meaning, however.

For example:

Clifford's education of Connie "roused in her a passion... deeper than any love affair could have done."

Clifford's education "roused in [Connie] a passion and response deeper than any love affair."

Leading in to your quotes: providing context

It is **never acceptable to just casually drop in a quote**. You need to lead into it, contextualising the situation for your marker. For example, you might want to showcase a quotation from *Jasper Jones* by Craig Silvey. Lead into the quotation with a short contextual orientation for your marker. Three different approaches are:

1. *When Charlie says to Jasper through his bedroom window, ...*
2. *Notice how Charlie reveals his insecurity when he says to Jasper, ...*
3. *Silvey demonstrates his underlying values when his protagonist says to Jasper...*

Where the quote comes from within the text, or the situation in which it arose, can have a significant impact on the way the reader will interpret it. Not providing this context can lead to markers being uncertain of the logic of your interpretation.

Leading out: analysis

After you have provided your evidence, lead out of it effectively. For example, **explain how this evidence proves this paragraph's point**. To say 'this clearly shows' is to reveal your lack of deconstruction skills. Quotations will never 'clearly show' anything; your job as a Literature student is to show exactly how the quote functions to support the point you are making. This is where your real analysis comes into play, where you showcase your ability to analyse textual evidence. This is a key component of any Literature essay, yet one that is often overlooked by students.

The effective leading-out of a quotation is also an excellent opportunity for you to demonstrate your technical terminology.

For example, instead of writing:

The dialogue here shows...

You might want to lead out with:

Notice the protagonist's cruel tone and accusative inflection when he says...

A useful technique for managing the use of quotations is S.Q.E., which stands for Statement (which is what you are trying to prove), Quotation, Explanation. You make a statement, use the quotation and then explain the relevance.

