

How to turn an average essay into an excellent essay

An important distinction to be aware of is that the expectation of Year 11 English was geared more toward themes and characters. However in Year 12, teachers and examiners expect students to focus on the **author's construction of the text (textual features)**. By keeping in mind that the text is a DELIBERATE CONSTRUCTION, this can help eliminate retelling. The way to do this, is that every time you bring a bit of evidence (quote or reference to the text) think about *how* this information is presented: what is the/a textual feature employed to present this bit of evidence.

Another guideline to follow is to include the author's name at least once every paragraph. Some examples are:

- (author) elicits/evokes (when discussing the effect on readers).
- (author) endorses or condemns (values and concerns)
- (author) conveys (author's view)

Move beyond talking about characters and relationships. How are those characters used to explore themes/ideas? How are they used to show readers what the author values?

To explore the text BEYOND characters, themes and ideas, consider the following criteria:

Social, cultural and historical values embodied in text

In other words, this means the context in which the text was written. Think about how that influenced the author, and how those views and values are reflected in the text. How does the author create social commentary on humanity?

Linguistic/language structures and features

These involve the author's use of symbols, metaphors, subtext, or genres.

Consider why the author chose those particular words, images or symbols? What effect did it evoke within the reader? What themes or characters are embodied within these literary devices?

How a text is open to different interpretations

"While some may perceive... others may believe..." is a good guideline to follow in order to explore different angles and complexities of the text.

In order to give your own interpretation strength, it helps to acknowledge that there are other ways of interpreting some of the ideas and values in the text, *especially* if you are then able to rebut these other interpretations (although you don't have to rebut them, acknowledging them is enough for this level).

Skilful weaving in of appropriate quotes

This is how to create a well-substantiated essay. To weave in textual evidence, don't simply

'plonk' in sentence long quotes. Instead, use worded quotes within your sentences so the transition is seamless.

Strong turn of phrase

Ensure your essay is always linked to the essay topic; don't go off on an unrelated tangent. Linking words such as "conversely" or "furthermore" increase coherence within your essay. Begin each paragraph with a strong topic sentence, and finish each paragraph with a broader perception that links back to the topic and the next paragraph (if possible; if you can't do this naturally, don't force it) – and then start the next paragraph with a connective to strengthen this Link.

This is also where having a wide range of vocabulary is crucial to presenting your ideas in a sophisticated manner. Create a word bank from assessor's reports, sample essays, or teacher's notes, and by the end of the year you'll have an extensive list to choose from.

Also, referring to literary devices (language) contributes to a great vocabulary, exhibiting a strong turn of phrase!

Consider the **topic**:

What does it imply? Find the underlying message and the implications behind the topic. There is always tension within the topic that needs to be resolved by the conclusion of your essay.

Also – work out if the topic is one that focuses on characters *or* themes (or in an exam, it might be a *how* question – which asks you to focus on *how* the text constructs meaning. This can be misleading, as all of your essays will still have to mention all three of these things, but it's crucial in determining what the primary focus is, and therefore which needs to be more directly addressed in your intro, conclusion, and topic sentences (with the other points emerging/discussed elsewhere in your body paragraphs).

Finally, simply (try to) enjoy writing about your text! It will help you write with a sense of personal voice and a personal engagement with the text, which teachers and assessors will always enjoy. If you are cynical, this will be evident, especially to examiners!