

# GCSE subject criteria for English

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## Introduction

1. GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in English. They provide the framework within which an awarding body creates the detail of the specification.
2. Specifications must also meet the regulators' general requirements, including the common and GCSE criteria as defined in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293).
3. Subject criteria are intended to:
  - help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
  - ensure that the rigour of GCSE is maintained
  - ensure that specifications build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established by the national curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales and facilitate progression to higher level qualifications in English
  - help higher education institutions, employers and other stakeholders, such as learners and parents/guardians, know what has been studied and assessed.
4. Any GCSE specification that contains significant elements of English must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## Aims and learning outcomes

5. GCSE specifications in English should encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study. They should prepare learners to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career choices, to use language to participate effectively in society and employment and to develop their enthusiasm for reading.
6. GCSE specifications in English must enable learners to:
  - demonstrate skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing necessary to communicate with others confidently, effectively, precisely and appropriately

- express themselves creatively and imaginatively
- understand the patterns, structures and conventions of written and spoken English
- select and adapt speech and writing to different situations and audiences
- understand how variations in spoken and written language relate to identity and cultural diversity
- become critical readers of a range of texts, including multimodal texts
- use reading to gain access to knowledge and to develop their own skills as writers
- understand that texts from the English, Welsh and Irish literary heritage have been influential and significant over time and explore the meaning of these today
- understand how literature from other cultures is influential
- connect ideas, themes and issues, drawing on a range of texts.

## **Subject content**

7. The content of GCSE specifications in English must reflect the learning outcomes.
8. GCSE specifications in English must specify the content in ways that promote an integrated approach to speaking and listening, reading and writing.
9. GCSE specifications in English must be consistent with the national curriculum key stage 4 programme of study requirements in the order for England and the statutory requirements for key stage 4 in Northern Ireland.
10. GCSE specifications in English must allow learners to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of English in the:
  - daily world
  - world of imagination as specified below.
11. GCSE specifications in English must require learners to:

- analyse spoken and written language, exploring impact and how it is achieved
  - express ideas and information clearly, precisely, accurately and appropriately in spoken and written communication
  - form independent views and challenge what is heard or read on the grounds of reason, evidence or argument
  - understand and use the conventions of written language, including grammar, spelling and punctuation
  - explore questions, solve problems and develop ideas
  - engage with and make fresh connections between ideas, texts and words
  - experiment with language to create effects to engage the audience
  - reflect and comment critically on their own and others' use of language.
12. In speaking and listening, GCSE specifications in English must require learners to:
- present and listen to information and ideas
  - respond appropriately to the questions and views of others
  - participate in a range of real life contexts in and beyond the classroom, adapting talk to situation and audience and using standard English where appropriate
  - select and use a range of techniques and creative approaches to explore ideas, texts and issues in scripted and improvised work.
13. In reading, GCSE specifications in English must require learners to:
- understand how meaning is constructed through words, sentences and whole texts, recognising and responding to the effects of language variation
  - evaluate the ways in which texts may be interpreted differently according to the perspective of the reader
  - read a rich range of prose, poetry and drama, including a text from the English, Welsh or Irish literary heritage, a play by Shakespeare and a text from a different culture or tradition

- understand how texts from the literary heritage have been influential and significant over time
  - explore how texts from different cultures and traditions may reflect or influence values and assumptions.
14. GCSE specifications in English must require learners to write accurately and fluently:
- choosing content and adapting style and language to a wide range of forms, media, contexts, audiences and purposes
  - adapting form to a wide range of styles and genres.

## Assessment objectives

15. All specifications in English must require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

Assessment objectives		Weighting (%)
<b>AO1</b>	<p><b>Speaking and listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Speak to communicate clearly and purposefully; structure and sustain talk, adapting it to different situations and audiences; use standard English and a variety of techniques as appropriate.</li> <li>■ Listen and respond to speakers' ideas, perspectives and how they construct and express their meanings.</li> <li>■ Interact with others, shaping meanings through suggestions, comments and questions and drawing ideas together.</li> <li>■ Create and sustain different roles.</li> </ul>	<b>20</b>

<b>AO2</b>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Read and understand texts, selecting material appropriate to purpose, collating from different sources and making comparisons and cross-references as appropriate.</li> <li>■ Develop and sustain interpretations of writers' ideas and perspectives.</li> <li>■ Explain and evaluate how writers use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader.</li> <li>■ Understand texts in their social, cultural and historical contexts.</li> </ul>	<b>40</b>
<b>AO3</b>	<p><b>Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Write clearly, effectively and imaginatively, using and adapting forms and selecting vocabulary appropriate to task and purpose in ways that engage the reader.</li> <li>■ Organise information and ideas into structured and sequenced sentences, paragraphs and whole texts, using a variety of linguistic and structural features to support cohesion and overall coherence.</li> <li>■ Use a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.</li> </ul> <p><i>At least one-third of the available credit should be allocated to this last part of AO3.</i></p>	<b>40</b>

## Scheme of assessment

16. GCSE specifications in English must allocate a weighting of 40 per cent to external assessment and a weighting of 60 per cent to controlled assessment in the overall scheme of assessment.

17. Question papers in English must be targeted at either foundation or higher tier.
18. GCSE assessments in English must allocate a weighting of 45–55 per cent for the functional elements of English.

## Grade descriptions

19. Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by candidates awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content.
20. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of candidates' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.

Grade	Description
<b>A</b>	<p>Candidates select suitable styles and registers of spoken English for a range of situations and contexts, showing assured use of standard English where appropriate. They confidently vary sentence structures and choose from a broad repertoire of vocabulary to express information, ideas and feelings in an engaging manner. They initiate conversations and demonstrate sensitive listening through contributions that sustain and develop discussion. They recognise and fulfil the demands of different roles, whether in formal settings or creative activities.</p> <p>Candidates respond personally and persuasively to a variety of texts, developing interpretations and evaluating how details of language, grammar, structure and presentation engage and affect the reader. They identify and discuss writers' perspectives in narrative, argument, explanation or analysis. They choose apt quotations and make telling comparisons and cross-references that illuminate the purpose and meanings of texts, explaining the impact of their social, cultural and historical contexts where appropriate.</p> <p>Candidates' writing shows confident, assured control of a range of forms and styles appropriate to task and purpose. Texts engage and hold the reader's interest through logical argument, persuasive force</p>

	<p>or creative delight. Linguistic and structural features are used skilfully to sequence texts and achieve coherence. A wide range of accurate sentence structures ensures clarity; choices of vocabulary, punctuation and spelling are ambitious, imaginative and correct.</p>
<b>C</b>	<p>Candidates adapt their talk to the demands of different situations and contexts. They recognise when standard English is required and use it confidently. They use different sentence structures and select vocabulary so that information, ideas and feelings are communicated clearly and the listener's interest is engaged. They explain and evaluate how they and others use and adapt spoken language for specific purposes. Through careful listening and by developing their own and others' ideas, they make significant contributions to discussion and participate effectively in creative activities.</p> <p>Candidates understand and demonstrate how meaning and information are conveyed in a range of texts. They make personal and critical responses, referring to specific aspects of language, grammar, structure and presentational devices to justify their views. They successfully compare and cross-reference aspects of texts and explain convincingly how they may vary in purpose and how they achieve different effects. They comment on how social, cultural and historical contexts affect readers' responses to texts.</p> <p>Candidates' writing shows successful adaptation of form and style to different tasks and for various purposes. They use a range of sentence structures and varied vocabulary to create different effects and engage the reader's interest. Paragraphing is used effectively to make the sequence of events or development of ideas coherent and clear to the reader. Sentence structures are varied; punctuation and spelling are accurate and sometimes bold.</p>
<b>F</b>	<p>Candidates talk confidently in familiar situations, showing some awareness of purpose and of listeners' needs. They convey information, develop ideas and describe feelings clearly, using the main features of standard English as appropriate. They listen with concentration and make relevant responses to others' ideas and opinions. They show some awareness of how they and others use and adapt spoken language for specific purposes. In formal and creative activities, they attempt to meet the demands of different roles.</p> <p>Candidates describe the main ideas, themes or argument in a range</p>

	<p>of texts and refer to specific aspects or details when justifying their views. They make simple comparisons and cross-references that show some awareness of how texts achieve their effects through writers' use of linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational devices. They are aware that some features of texts relate to their specific social, cultural and historical contexts.</p> <p>Candidates' writing shows some adaptation of form and style for different tasks and purposes. It communicates simply and clearly with the reader. Sentences sequence events or ideas logically; vocabulary is sometimes chosen for variety and interest. Paragraphing is straightforward but effective; the structure of sentences, including some that are complex, is usually correct. Spelling and basic punctuation are mostly accurate.</p>
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