

Hints on Essay Writing (Paper 1, Part 1)
English Language O Level 1120

1. Candidates will be given a **choice of topic** to write about. They should read the questions carefully and choose the topic which gives them the best chance of writing an essay of the required length.

Candidates who are not strong in English may find it easiest to choose a narrative rather than a descriptive or discursive/argumentative option. They should also choose to write from personal experience if possible as freshness and originality of approach are what make the writing interesting and distinctive.

2. Having chosen the topic, it is advisable to make a **plan**. Plan for about six paragraphs of varied length for an essay of 450-500 words.
3. The essay must have a good **beginning** to capture the attention of the reader and make him/her want to read on. Try to write a striking opening sentence that reads fluently and is free of errors – remember that first impressions are important! It is also important to write relevantly to the topic from the start: if the title is ‘The Island’, do not spend three paragraphs on the journey to reach the island without even mentioning the destination...
4. The **middle** section of the essay should convey the main steps in the story or the details of the description or the main points of the argument. Make sure that the paragraphs develop logically and are linked by the opening sentences of each successive paragraph. Never begin successive paragraphs with the same word or phrase though – for example ‘Then he went...’ and ‘Then he went...’. Remember to have a pivotal word if you are giving both sides of an argument: ‘However...’ or ‘On the other hand.....’ etc. If using direct speech, it is important to remember to use speech marks and to begin a new paragraph for each new speaker. Try to include a range of interesting, precise and mature vocabulary in the essay to bring the details to life for the reader.
5. Finally, your essay should have a strong **ending**. It is often effective to have a short and emphatic final paragraph. It may provide the conclusion to an argument, or it may move to the general view after some precise description of details, or it may provide the climax or round off a story, perhaps with a final stress on the relevance of the story to the topic of the question. For example, if the topic was ‘An embarrassing incident in a restaurant’, your final sentence might be ‘I knew that I should never be able to go to that restaurant again!’.

6. It is very important to leave time to **check** work, by reading through the essay to correct any slips or errors and to fill in any vital words that may have been omitted in the haste and excitement of writing.

A mnemonic such as 'ACROSBIE' may help to remind you of the vital ingredients:

Accuracy; Choice; Relevance; Order; Style; Beginning; Interest; Ending.