

How to Pass Higher/National 5 English

Both Higher and National 5 English present a demanding test of students' literacy skills. The final course assessment for both of these qualifications is made up of:

- 30%: Close Reading,
- 40%: literature - one Critical Essay and one set of questions on a specified Scottish text
- 30%: portfolio of writing – two pieces written by the student

Experience shows that success in the course is more likely when a student:

- Is motivated and wants to succeed
- Reads at home – both fiction and quality journalism
- Attends all classes and listens closely to advice from the teacher
- Completes all homework tasks set
- Shows active engagement in class – asking and answering questions
- Studies regularly – at least 4 hours of English over the week
- Tackles difficulties early by seeking help from the teacher when a problem arises
- Attends department study support during term time
- Attends Easter School classes

To improve in Close Reading the student should:

- Train for it by reading quality journalism (print or online) several times per week. Exam papers are based on articles from papers like The Herald, The Observer, The Sunday Times.
- While reading these, use the study template with each article to develop the thinking skills which the exam tests
- Get to grips with the types of exam questions asked, and seek the teacher's help with model answers
- Use booklets and handouts to practise difficult types of question
- Use the English Department's online pages which are currently under development
- Analyse past performances in tests, homework etc to find out which of the skills is his/her weakness
- Consider buying *Flash Revise! Higher English Close Reading* by Colin Eckford (Hodder Gibson)
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To boost marks in the Scottish set texts and Critical Essays, the student should:

- Know the texts. Read and re-read all the texts to be answered on in the exam. The students should be doing this continuously without being told to.
- Memorise all quotations recommended by the teacher, and more besides. There are many different techniques for memorising quotations: post-it notes, reciting, copying out, wall displays, recording them, getting parents/friends to test them...
- Use online resources recommended by the teacher to deepen understanding of the texts

- Consider buying York Notes on those texts (GCSE level is adequate for N5/Higher home study)
- Do extra timed essays at home. Practise planning as well as writing them in under 45 minutes – that is the time allowed in the exam.
- Take on board feedback. Mainly, the examiners are looking for:
 1. Detailed knowledge of texts, including quotations
 2. Understanding of the themes of the texts
 3. Appreciation of the literary techniques used by an author
 4. A relevant and well structured essay which uses accurate English

To improve folio pieces:

- Try to choose original topics. Don't repeat previous work.
- Proof-read every draft. Ensure basic English is correct – essays can fail for poor punctuation and sentence construction.
- Bring all notes and drafts to classes when portfolio work is being done
- Take responsibility for the length – there are upper and lower limits which must be followed or the essay can fail
- Sources need to be properly acknowledged in a bibliography
- All previous drafts need to be kept in school as authentication
- The essays and stories MUST be the student's own work. The SQA are very strict about what a teacher or anyone else may contribute to a young person's work. For this reason, all portfolio pieces will be done in school time.

Internal assessments

- There are several pass/fail assessments involved in both courses. These are included on the school assessment timeline and will be notified well in advance
- If a student fails an assessment twice, he or she will not be able to complete the course and will need to change level. A further reassessment is only permitted by SQA in exceptional circumstances.

Study Support

- In-house Study Support is available in the department every Monday and Friday lunchtime with Mrs McMillan. Any student is welcome to drop in for advice and help with homework or any other part of the course. A range of prelim study support classes run after Christmas, and there are Easter School classes for students to opt into as well.
- We do not recommend the use of private tutors. Many of them do not work in a secondary English department, nor do they have up to date experience with the new qualifications. If you or your child feels that he/she needs extra help with English, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs McMillan at the school to discuss the support we can offer.

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