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# English

How to get a 45+ in English!



By **Liora**

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Whether you like it or not, doing an English subject is compulsory, and doing well in English is probably more important than doing well in any other subject, simply because it will hog a spot in your primary 4. A high score in English leads to a better chance of achieving a higher ATAR. As VCE English is the most popular of all the English subjects, in order to impress the examiners as they monotonously read through 40,000 students' 3 essays, you have to be different. If like me, you love reading and writing, then you have an advantage. And if not, you just need to adjust your perspective and find a way to enjoy the subject; it'll make your year that much easier and motivate you to study. Follow these few tips, and you'll be walking into the exam ready to show off your unique style and literary interpretations.

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## Your Texts

### The Number 1 Rule: Know Your Texts!

For those of you who think you can get away without actually reading your texts and simply writing essays off your annotations taken in class and your teacher's comments, you're wrong. The best way to build confidence when writing essays is to know your texts inside out and back-to-front. Being familiar with the plot, character interactions and key themes will make it much easier for you to be able to remember quotes and come up with ideas for your paragraphs while under time pressure. I recommend reading your texts at least 3 times, if not more, throughout the year, following this pattern:

- First read in the summer holidays before school starts purely for enjoyment.
- Second read in the holidays and start thinking about the main ideas.
- Third read in class as you go through the book and add your highlights and annotations.
- Fourth read/skim before your SAC to go over what you highlighted and annotated.
- Fifth read during exam study while you gather all of your notes and make sure you haven't missed any important quotes.



If your text is also a **movie**, I think it's a good idea to **watch it** after you have read the book for the first time, so you have some sort of **visual representation**, and also for some enjoyment to relieve the stress of studying and keep your motivation high. Another thing I found really beneficial was to make plot summaries in dot point form, a map of the character interactions and summaries of the key characters.

- I did all of this during the holidays before school started so that when it came to reading in class, I walked into class confident and already knew what my teacher was talking about.
- There are also numerous websites you can read to help you make your summaries and deepen your understanding of the texts, and a lot of them are listed on Studyclix alongside short and helpful video explanations, so make sure you take advantage of these resources!

### [Your Best Friend: Vocabulary!](#)

Your English exam quite literally depends on you stringing specific words together to form 3 pieces of writing. If you want to keep the examiners engaged and show off your WOW factor, then you need to make sure your use of vocabulary is carefully thought-out, varied and precise. For every SAC and section of the exam, I put together word banks of the specific vocabulary that would suit my essay. It might also help you to read past students' essays and add to your vocabulary from the words they used. Each essay you write will have a different style and tone, so ensuring you use the appropriate vocabulary will help you stand out against the thousands of other



students. Keep adding to your word banks and make sure you practise your writing using any new words you learn so that by the time the exam comes around, you won't even need to think and words will come naturally to you!



## How do I study for SACs?

### 1. The Creative

This is a really enjoyable and not too challenging SAC. Unlike the other essays, you can be more creative (hence the name) and use writing techniques that you've picked up from reading different genres of books throughout your life. Of course, there will be requirements, but have fun with it and pretend you're an author creating a piece of fiction for others to enjoy. I prepared for this SAC by writing short pieces centered around different parts of the book in another character's perspective, and also writing an extra chapter at the end. Some other ways to practise could be writing a letter, diary entry, journal or monologue. As long as you base your piece around the ideas of the text and don't go too off-track, you can't really go wrong!

### 2. Language Analysis

Hopefully you have some familiarity with language analysis from year 10 and/or 11. In my opinion this is the hardest SAC and also the hardest section of the exam, as you can't prepare an essay in advance. The way to master language analysis is to **expose yourself to lots of different newspaper editorials/opinion pieces**, covering a range of issues and written in a range of tones. Practise analysing as many different articles as



you can, using precise terminology that matches the tone and style of the writer. I always used a simple introduction structure, so I knew how to start any language analysis, and then I followed the arguments in order, picking out the most important quotes to analyse. The more you do, the easier it will become and the faster you will get, I promise!

### 3. Single Text Response

If you do some preparatory work in the holidays, such as plot and character summaries, then understanding your text won't be so difficult. In class, you can focus on the analysis of quotes that will help build your essay. The most important thing for a single text analysis is to have an extensive quote bank, covering all the key themes. When structuring my quote bank, I liked to divide the table into different columns:

- Quote
- Context i.e. who said it and to whom, what the situation was at that point
- Analysis
- Related Themes

The quotes that relate to the most themes are the ones you should try to remember, as well as any other important ones.



And of course, you should **practise different essay topics**, especially past SAC topics, relating to both character and theme. The more you practise, the more you will find you are using similar phrases and ideas. When it comes to your SAC, you won't feel under so much pressure to come up with new ideas, as you'll have written many essays and you'll be able to utilise some of what you have already written when studying.

#### 4. The Oral

This is also one of the easy SACs that is done and dusted without having to worry about it for the exam. 😊

As far as I know, most schools have their oral presentations at the beginning of the third term, so you'll have the midyear holidays to prepare. I don't think it's too difficult to secure a high score for this SAC. Just make sure you **practise delivering your speech** so you don't end up reading your cue cards and sounding monotone. It's also crucial that you write your own speech using your own words, on a topic that you are passionate about and fully understand. This will help you achieve a more authentic delivery, and you'll be able to answer any questions your teacher or peers may ask.

I would avoid using words you aren't familiar with just to 'sound fancy'; keep it genuine and clear.





## 5. The Comparative

This is similar to single text response, however a **longer essay** and with **less focus on the details** of each text, and **more focus on the similarities and differences** between the two.

The same principle applies to a comparative quote bank as a quote bank for single text; prioritise remembering the quotes that apply to the most themes, but also the quotes that best highlight the comparative points you will make.

Just like single text, practise essays for different topics. From my experience, there are fewer different questions that can be asked of you, as the questions have to relate to an idea that is common in both texts. I always liked to add some philosophical discussion in each paragraph, to show how the ideas in the texts relate to real life.

Also, **make sure you discuss both texts** in all of your paragraphs!



## How do I study for the Exam?

### → Past VCAA Exams!

Studying for the exam is not that much different to studying for SACs. You already have the whole years' worth of experience by the time you reach the exam study period. One of the main differences is that you should now **turn to past VCAA exams**, and try to get through as many of them as you can!

I personally didn't use that many company papers, as I found their questions to be not the same standard as the VCAA ones. VCAA exams also include the northern hemisphere papers, so make sure you do those as well!

Most schools run a mock exam so you can get a feel for the time, but if not, make sure you sit at least one proper exam at home. I didn't find it necessary to do more than one 3-hour timed practise exam, but rather I just timed my individual essays. **Just to recap my tips from preparing for SACs:**

#### Single Text Response

- Answer the question!
- Quote Bank
- Practice Essays
- Time Yourself

#### The Comparative

- Answer the question!
- Quote bank
- Practise essays
- Time yourself
- Remember to discuss similarities and differences, through character, plot, symbolism, imagery, time, setting etc.

#### Language Analysis

- Analyse everything on the page, even the smallest slogans and images!
- Read the background information!
- Time yourself

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## How do I handle the exam?

### ▶ Time Management

In my opinion, the English exam is the hardest exam to manage your time. 3 essays in 3 hours is no easy task, and it's not hard to become engrossed in one essay and lose track of the time. My personal strategy was to **spend all 15 minutes of reading time on the language analysis material**, without so much as a glance at the other essay topics. I did this so I could focus completely on my analysis without getting distracted by the other sections, and it worked really well for me.

When it comes to actually writing the essays, I had the same routine for all 3:

- ▶ 5 minutes of planning
- ▶ 50 minutes of writing
- ▶ 5 minutes of proofreading

Doing this ensures you have time to go through all of your essays when you finish them, without having to worry about trying to proofread everything at the very end.

### ▶ Order of the Paper

You can really complete the exam in any order you like however, based on my tips for time management, **I would suggest doing language analysis first** after you've spent 15 minutes reading the material. After that, it doesn't really make a difference which



essay you do next, but I recommend choosing your strength first, whether that's single text analysis or the comparative. Also make sure you decide a few weeks before the exam, so you can practise completing essays in that same order.



## Some Final Tips

### ❖ The Danger of Memorising

It's no secret that a lot of students memorise essays for their SACs and for the exam. Personally, I am not completely against this technique, HOWEVER, it is extremely risky. The number one rule for answering an English essay is to ANSWER THE QUESTION! If you regurgitate a prepared essay on the paper, you are at risk of ignoring what the question is actually asking, and simply chucking the key words into your intro and topic sentences. This will not give you a high mark. Instead, write essays for different topics, and you'll find that you inevitably remember a lot of what you're practiced anyway. It's extremely important that you are confident with adapting and coming up with ideas on the spot, so you ensure you are writing specifically to suit the question in front of you. I walked into my exam with essays in the back of my mind, however, I made sure to unpack the questions and only write what was relevant to those questions.

### ❖ Write at Length

A quick and easy tip, but make sure you're writing at least 800 words for all sections. Any lower, and you're most likely to not properly develop your ideas. But avoid writing much more than 1000 words, you simply just won't have the time.



### ❖ The Day Before the Exam

About 2-3 days before my exam, I stopped writing new essays, and instead just revised by reading over all of the essays I had written. You don't want your essays to be stale on the day, so to keep your writing fresh and original, take a break and let your mind relax before the final stretch. The trick is to come across as confident and someone who has clearly taken the time to properly study the texts, but not boring and repetitive like someone who's written the same thing over and over. It's hard to do, but if you put your pen down a few days before, it'll help you maintain that fresh tone on the day!

### ❖ Find Your Flare!

Other than the basic criteria, there are no 'laws' when it comes to your writing style. Obviously, it has to be formal and academic, but that doesn't mean you can't have your own voice and unique style. Write in the way that best enables you to be confident and develop complex ideas. Use language that you understand and that will help you shine and stand out from everyone else. There is no formula for success in English!





*Best of luck in the exam! You will be great. 😊*

