

UNIT 6: Discursive and Argumentative Writing

Recommended prior knowledge: A reasonable standard of written English at O/GCSE level will ensure familiarity with the writing of structured prose and provide a sound basis for development

Context: This Unit has as its subject the acquisition of skills for Paper 2 Section B, and might be best studied towards the end of the course, as students often find it the most challenging

Outline: This Unit addresses the writing of a discursive or argumentative essay in one hour under examination conditions, focusing on the skills and practice needed for writing a good essay of 600-900 words. This may sometimes be in letter form.

Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching/Learning Activities	Resources
<p><u>1. Formulating the difference between argumentative and discursive</u></p> <p>Although dictionary definitions of these terms make them seem very similar, a discussion of a topic takes a broad and thoughtful view which considers both or all sides of the topic; an argument usually presents a forceful set of reasons for adopting one point of view. Both forms demand a high level of logic in the structure if they are to be successful. Practice is essential for successful achievement in this Unit.</p>	<p>Although work for this Unit is often seen as very demanding, it offers much scope for class discussion and debate, including formal debates with proposers and seconders to a motion. Individual speeches can also be given to the class group.</p> <p>Consider some issues which inspire strong feelings and debate to what extent they can be discussed in a balanced way, and how far they are felt to demand an argumentative approach.</p> <p>Introduce the idea of ‘playing devil’s advocate’ and try to encourage students to adopt and develop arguments that they do not personally subscribe to: this helps to develop objectivity and a logical approach to controversy.</p>	<p>www.bbc.co.uk/education/asguru/english has very useful drop down menus</p> <p>www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess/</p> <p>www.beginningwriters.com</p> <p>www.ngfl.gov.uk</p> <p>www.ipl.org/</p>

<p><u>2.Successful pre-planning</u></p> <p>a) Before attempting even to plan, the key words of the essay title should be highlighted so that relevance is ensured.</p> <p>b) brainstorming: this is the name given to the activity in which all the writer's ideas on the topic are allowed to flow onto the page and be recorded. These may take the form of a patterned plan, or as it is sometimes known, a spider plan or brain pattern. One idea leads to another and all the interconnections are shown, sometimes covering the page in a network of ideas. It should feel like a creative activity. Others do not find this form of brainstorming helpful, and feel more comfortable making a list.</p>	<p>Work through lists of discursive essays, highlighting the key words in the title: these will often be verbs.</p> <p>Brain patterns can be drawn on the board, with the whole group contributing ideas, and learning to let them flow and develop into new areas. This work is a very useful group activity and encourages more diffident members of the group who lack confidence in their own ideas, when they see their incipient thoughts grasped and furthered by others</p> <p>Lists can be created under headings from the spider plan, for those who work better in a more linear fashion (and it must be remembered that a written essay is a linear form, so the ideas will eventually have to be processed in a linear way)</p> <p>Sharing ideas and contributing to a class brainstorm is an excellent activity for developing both content and form for a discursive or argumentative essay</p>	<p>Past examination papers of all levels can be used</p> <p>Spider Plan</p>
<p><u>3.Essential planning</u></p> <p>From all the ideas generated must follow the selection of suitable material which is relevant to the essay title (guided by the highlighted key words) Inevitably some material will have to be abandoned, and students find this a difficult discipline, as they do in other subjects where they are trying to cram as much in as possible.</p>	<p>Exercises in summary where key points are identified are helpful for focusing an argument.</p> <p>Exercise in which only five main points (with supporting examples) are allowed also help in the important task of prioritising material. Such points form an essay plan.</p>	
<p><u>4.Essential paragraphing</u></p> <p>At this stage, the introductory and concluding paragraphs of the essay should not be focused upon.</p>	<p>Writing paragraphs on single topics can be practised. There should be one topic sentence and the rest should be in support of it. This work is an essential groundwork for writing a logically structured, well planned essay. It is suitable for group work, where the group can monitor each other's contributions.</p>	

<p>The material must be selected and then grouped into paragraphs: groups of sentences which contain one controlling idea and sentences which support that idea. The sentence which contains the main idea of the paragraph is sometimes known as the topic sentence. There may be four or five sentences in a paragraph, though it will depend on the subject matter. In summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One main idea • Clearly stated • Supported with examples • Linking with the previous paragraph and the one that follows (see next point for signposting) 	<p>Practice in organisation can begin with good essays being physically cut into paragraphs. The students reassemble them in the correct order and give reasons for their decisions.</p>	
<p><u>5. Essential Signposting</u></p> <p>The paragraphs need to be arranged in a form for maximum effectiveness of presentation.</p> <p>The direction of the argument must be signposted for the reader, helping her/him to follow the structure of the argument, seeing where it is going, making its logic easy to follow.</p> <p>Signposts in an argument are usually to be found at the beginning of the paragraph. They may be single words such as 'but', 'however', 'similarly', or phrases such as 'on the other hand' or 'another way in which...'</p>	<p>This is one of the key elements of a good argument, and it is just as important if the ideas are being presented in letter form.</p> <p>Analyse good letters to the editor of a newspaper and good leader writers or article writers, in order to see good signposting at work.</p> <p>Students must try these signposting devices for themselves, starting with simple accumulating arguments. E.g. 'Give reasons why you enjoy a particular sport' could begin 'The main reason'...followed by 'another reason...' followed by 'I also like...' followed by 'But my main reason is...'</p> <p>This relatively simple formula can be developed and extended to serve the more complex set of arguments that would be needed for 'Discuss the idea that television does more harm than good'. Such an essay will almost certainly demand 'On the other hand...' at a critical moment.</p>	
<p><u>6 Writing</u></p> <p>Check that ideas are in the right order, then try writing them in paragraphs following the guidelines given above, omitting the</p>	<p>As much practice as possible will make essay writing more enjoyable. It is like a game, and if the rules are followed, the whole will fall into place. A plan can be formulated every time.</p>	

<p>introduction and conclusion. The four or five paragraphs that result are often known as the main body of the essay. The ideas should follow a logical sequence and the structure of the essay should be clear.</p>		
<p><u>7 Introductions and conclusions</u></p> <p>An introduction should show the reader that the question is going to be addressed and how the writer is going to discuss the topic. It should make the reader want to read on. It does not have to be very long, provided that it is clear.</p> <p>A good conclusion should be strong, pulling the essay together. It is a pity if all it does is to repeat the earlier arguments; a good conclusion can add something else to the argument, saving a good point to the end.</p>	<p>Give essay topics and practice writing introductions. They can be taken in and read out loud, with the merits of each one discussed, anonymously if required. This exercise cannot be duplicated with conclusions, which depend upon the thrust of the preceding essay!</p> <p>Plans can be created with the introduction and conclusion written in full and the main body in point form.</p>	<p>Durrran and Stewart: Student Handbook English (Pearson Publishing) ISBN 1 85749 585 3</p>
<p><u>8 Editing: an important final check</u></p> <p>Under exam conditions, a check must be made that the sentences are clear. Is grammar and spelling accurate?</p>	<p>Every piece of work should be checked as a matter of course.</p>	<p>Getting to Grips with Punctuation and Grammar: Catherine Hilton, Margaret Hyder (Letts; ISBN 1-85758-090-7)</p>
<p><u>9 The letter form</u></p> <p>Every day, in quality newspapers all over the world, letters are printed expressing a point of view or argument. Letters of complaint are written to all manner of agencies and public departments, setting out logical arguments in order to persuade the reader of the validity of a point of view. These are argumentative essays, and require introductions, main bodies and conclusions as suggested above. However, they are not addressed to a general reader, and the recipient of the letter must always be kept in mind.</p>	<p>Reading and writing letters of argument and complaint must be practised.</p> <p>Suitable advice on layouts (address, introduction and closure) should be given, including email format</p>	<p>The following newspapers all have websites: The Times; The Independent; The Guardian</p>

<p>10 <u>Material for practice</u> Becoming responsive to the world and its issues</p> <p>Reading widely sharpens the scope of content for arguments and exemplifies the guidelines given above.</p>	<p>A stock of good quality newspapers and journals with topical articles should be gathered.</p>	<p>www.time.com for example</p>
<p>11 <u>Reading, writing, sharing</u></p>	<p>Do as much timed practice as possible before the exam including essay plans Read and comment on each other's work Display good examples on the walls of the classroom Conduct formal debates as well as general discussions Listen to each other's points of view Try to argue with logic as well as passion</p>	