

 ***exam* TIPS(1)**

**the ‘SMILER’ technique**

The *SMILER* technique is a really useful way of remembering how to structure your response to the exam question. It basically breaks your answer down into six main parts – one for each letter in ‘SMILER’. Within each of these sections, you compare the two poems that you are working with for that particular section. What is especially useful is that the ‘S’ (for ‘subject’) section at the start, doubles up as a good introduction to your essay, while ‘R’ (for ‘response’) acts as your conclusion! The bullet points will give you a guide to the sorts of things that you should be comparing / including – not all of them may be relevant to the poem you are looking at, and you might even think of other things to include! **It is useful, though, to try to learn this structure off by heart and apply it to any essay you write about the Anthology!**

‘S’ for ‘Subject’

* What are the poems about, and what is their main link to the area of focus on the title?
* Who is the narrator of each poem?
* Who are the characters in the poem?
* Why were the poems written?
* Are there any overall points or messages to the poems?

‘M’ for ‘Movement of Ideas’

* Whether they are split into stanzas, and how regular these are
* Whether there is a specific pattern to stanzas / line-lengths / rhythm / rhyme (and why!)
* Ideas that are contained in each stanza, and how these are sequenced, leading to the end

‘I’ for ‘Imagery’

* Literal images – ones that are described as they are, with no comparison
* Metaphors and similes, that use comparison for striking effect
* Symbolism – where an object or image represents something deeper or more significant

‘L’ for ‘Language’\*

* Particularly effective parts of speech (i.e. verbs, adjectives, adverbs)
* Sounds of words used for effect – through techniques like alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia
* Words which are used together for effect, such as hyperbole, repetition, oxymoron, etc.

‘E’ for ‘Emotions’

* The emotions of the whoever is narrating the poems
* The emotions of other characters in the poems
* Hoew emotions and moods change through the poems

‘R’ for ‘Response’

* What YOU think of each poem overall
* What you believe the significant similarities and differences between the poems are
* Your lasting impression of each poem (in the light of the area of focus in the question)

(EXTENSION: Team up with someone else. One of you should make some brief notes under the SMILER headings for *London,* the other for *Exposure.* When you’ve both done this, talk through the notes you’ve made, and try to make some comparisons or comparative statements between the poems for each section. *Eg. ‘Where Blake is a mere onlooker in his poem, Wilfred Owen is suffering alongside his fellow solders.’*



 ***exam* TIPS(2)**

**Annotating Extracts**

Making notes around your copy of the poem is called **annotating**. Annotating thoughtfully and well is really important – there may be a long gap of time between when you first study the poems and when you return to them to revise. It’s therefore really important that you annotate in a way that will be really useful when you look at your notes the second time around.

**Where to annotate?**

You have a number options here: you can either annotate directly into your copy of the anthology. If you are going to do this, make sure that you have your teacher’s permission, and that everything you are writing counts! A safer option is to print out fresh copies of the poems, cut out around them, and stick them into a separate place where you are making notes. You can then annotate around them.

**When to annotate?**

Some teachers will tell you exactly what to write next to each of your poems. However, remember that you cannot take these copies into the exam with you, so this is only useful if you memorise everything you are being told to write down. Other teachers will encourage you by giving you time to annotate, but expect you to write in your own comments. Sometimes, nothing will be said; in which case, you should try to approach the task on your own, and go ahead and annotate anyway. Make sure that ALL of your poems in the cluster have been well annotated, even of it means doing it in your own time! Annotating a fresh copy can also be an excellent revision exercise. Occasionally, you will hear something said about a poem – by the teacher or another student – that will really give you a new insight into the poem, and really bring it alive. It’s really important that you add these kind of comments to your annotations too!

**How to annotate?**

A good way to annotate is to use colour-coding. A suggested approach is this:

* Colour A: specific terms for poetic techniques
* Colour B: explaining the effect of examples of specific techniques on the reader
* Colour C: explaining content and deeper meaning
* Colour D: adding comments about context or about the poet

You can also think about WHERE on the page you are annotating. For example, in the anthologies, there is room around and above the poem title for general comments – these are likely to be about context, about the poet, ideas about the form of the poem as a whole. There is a narrow margin to the left of the poem – this is an ideal space for single words that identify poetic techniques. The larger space to the right of the poem could be where you make your longer comments about effects on the reader, or deeper meanings.

**A well-annotated poem should be clear, meaningful and enlightening! The page should be covered with neat, colour-coded comments around the poem, that can be easily understood.**

**TASK: On YouTube, there are plenty of examples of teachers or lecturers talking about one of the poems in this cluster that you are studying. Try, for example, one of the ‘Mr.Bruff’ videos. Print off a clean version of the poem, making sure that there is plenty of room around the poem to annotate. Have your four colours ready! As you hear new information about the poem, add annotations to your poem! If you need to pause the video while you write ideas in, that’s fine, but try to train yourself out of doing this, as you can’t pause a teacher in the classroom (unfortunately!)**



 ***exam* TIPS**

**‘S’ for Subject: Writing the Perfect Intro**

Consider this exam question:

**‘Compare the ways in which the poets present ideas about THE FORCE OF NATURE in *Storm on the Island* by Seamus Heaney and one other poem from *Power and Conflict*.’**

Lets’s say that the second poem that you’ve picked is the *Prelude* extract by Wordsworth. Two different students, Becky and Dev, have written their own introductions to the essay:

**Becky: “ In *Storm on the Island* by Seamus Heaney, and *The Prelude*, by William Wordsworth, both poets explore the force of nature in similar and different ways. I will be comparing both poems to look at how they do this.” (40 words)**

**Dev: “Although both of these powerful poems explore the force of nature upon man, Heaney and Wordsworth set about presenting the elements using interesting and individual aspects of structure and language.” (30 words)**

Now answer these questions:

1. Do they both **answer the question** directly?
2. Which would you say is the **better written** and **more engaged** and why?
3. Which refers to **form, structure and language** from the outset?
4. Which contains **EVALUATIVE** language (words and phrases that rate how good the poem is)?
5. Which would you say is the better introduction?

Now consider this new question, and pick *Exposure*  as your chosen poem:

**‘Compare the ways in which the poets explore man’s relationship with his environment in the extract from *The Prelude* by William Wordsworth and one other poem from *Power and Conflict*.’**

**TASK:** In the box below, write your introduction to this essay. Make sure that:

* It is no more than two sentences / 50 words long
* It includes the name of the poets or poems
* It includes the key terms of the title (ie: *man’s relationship with the environment*)
* It includes EVALUATIVE words (such as ‘sublte’, ‘powerful’, ‘eerie’)

**Once you have written your introduction, swap with a partner, and check theirs against the four bullet points above. How well do you think they have done? Is it relevant to the question? Does it sound enthusiastic?**



When you write your essay, it’s really important to get your tone and style right. This means that you are writing clearly, in the correct register, and in a way that engages the interest of your reader. This relates to parts of two of the Assessment Objectives for this question:

**AO1: maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response**

**AO2: using relevant subject terminology where appropriate**

**AO4: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation**

In the table below is a list of things examiners like and dislike about essay style:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Examiners Like…*** | ***Examiner’s Don’t Like…*** |
| 1. The use of standard, formal English
2. Use of evaluative words (words that show an appreciation of the poet’s qualities)
3. A mostly *impersonal* style (one that doesn’t often use the first person pronouns, ‘I’ or ‘me’)
4. Ambitious but relevant vocabulary
5. Use of specialist terminology (poetic and linguistic terms)
 | 1. Non-standard / slang / colloquial language (except when quoting from the poem)
2. Slang evaluative words, negative words (as in putting the poem down) or no evaluative words
3. Too much use of personal pronouns (‘I think that…’ etc)
4. Over-simplified or wrong choice of words
5. Incorrect or no use of terminology
 |

TASK: The five extracts below (from essays about the poem *Kamikaze*) all use features that could rub up the examiner the wrong way! Using the letter codes (f) to (j), identify the fault next to each. Then, use the letter codes (a) to (e) to write a new, improved version for each.

1. ***Kamikaze* is a really cool poem. I like the way it refers to nature and stuff in the bit about his dad being a fisherman.**
2. **‘Cloud-marked mackerel’ is a very effective simile, as the audience can picture the reflection of the clouds in the fish’s scale…’**
3. ***Kamikaze* is OK but there are bits of it I don’t understand. Like the bot about the feathery prawns, I mean, what’s that all about?**
4. **The third paragraph is really good. You can really picture the fishes swimming in shoals in the sea. ‘Flashing silver’ is a metaphor.**
5. **In the sixth verse, it switches from the pet telling the story to the pilot’s daughter telling it. This works well.**

EXTENSION: Go back to a recent Literature essay you have written. Try to identify where you may have written something in a tone or style that might not please the examiner. Identify the reason why this might be, then write a new, improved version in your book.

**Remember these rules for good, critical writing when you next write an essay!**

 ***exam* TIPS**

**Essay writing: getting tone and style right**



This worksheet will help you improve the way on which you write about language. The examples and questions on this sheet are based on the following example exam question, and we will use *Checking Out Me History* as the chosen poem:

**‘Compare the ways in which the poets present ideas about IDENTITY in ‘THE EMIGREE’ by Carol Rumens and one other poem from *Power and Conflict*.’**

**TASK ONE:**

In the statements below, the same language point has been written in two different ways:

***VERSION ONE:* A positive impression of the speaker’s ‘clear’ and ‘bright’ home city conveys the recurring sense of ‘sunlight’; the simple adjectives painting a positive, perhaps naïve take on memory ‘as a child’**

***VERSION TWO:* The speaker in the poem uses the noun ‘sunlight’ and the adjectives ‘bright’ and ‘clear’ to describe her home city. These are very simple and childish words.**

***VERSION THREE:* The poet uses words like ‘sunlight’, ‘bright’ and ‘clear’ to create a positive memory of the speaker’s home city.**

1. Which of these impresses you most? Put them in order from best to worst, and explain your decision.
2. Which of these manages to use ‘integrated’ references to the text of the poem?
3. Which of these includes one or more judgements of the effectiveness of the poet’s choice of words?
4. Which of these uses ‘subject terminology’ (i.e. specialist’Literature’ terms)?

**TASK TWO:**

A friend has written the response below in her essay.

***She uses the word ‘accuse’ twice to show that the people in the place she has come to are bullying her.***

Help her improve it by:

1. using the correct **terminology** rather than just being general
2. putting the **effect** of the technique before the actual technique in the sentence
3. ‘integrating’ or blending the quotations into the statement rather than them standing alone
4. including words which show your judgement of the poet’s effectiveness (these could be adjectives or adverbs)

**EXTENSION:** Using either the best point from Task 1, or your improved point from Task 2, go on to write some fresh points of language of your own. Remember to follow the advice in Task 2.

If you are feeling very brave, you could even develop one of your points into a comparative point, that brings in *Checking Out Me History.* Here is an example.

**A positive impression of the speaker’s ‘clear’ and ‘bright’ home city conveys the recurring sense of ‘sunlight’; the simple adjectives painting a positive, perhaps naïve take on memory ‘as a child’. Conversely, Agard wishes to explore ‘me history’ by exploring his original culture, which he is ‘carving out’ – the verb creating a strong sense of positive struggle.**

 ***exam* TIPS**

**‘L’is for Language: How to Write About Words**



\* You may wish to find out what ‘context’ means – or ask your teacher about it – before attempting the tasks on this sheet!

*Ozymandias* and *My Last Duchess*

**Not only were Shelley and Browning writing in different eras (1818 and 1846 respectively), they were also writing about different times in the past – Shelley about the a ruler in an ancient civilisation, and Browning about a sixteenth-century duke). Working in pairs, use the diagram below as a template to compare different aspects of CONTEXT in the poems. For each comparison that you make, ensure that you also come up with examples from each poem to back up your ideas…**

**What to do next:**

Look again at the comparison points you have made. Try to adapty them into saying something important about a) how the comparison reflects attitudes at the time the poems were written; and b) how the comparison reflects differences between the poets’ reflections on attitudes in the past in each case.

**You could then go on to…**

Try adapting some or all of these ideas into a ‘SMILER’ plan (see earlier sheet). Think about how these CONTEXT points might fit into particular sections on SMILER, especially SUBJECT, IMAGERY and EMOTIONS. You might want to repond to this particular question to help you:

**‘Compare the ways in which the poets present ideas about THE PAST in *Ozymandias* by Percy Shelley and one other poem from *Power and Conflict*.’ – choose *My Last Duchess* as the second poem**

 ***exam* TIPS**

**Putting into Context\*!**



**Remind yourself of the six stages of the SMILER technique (*Exam Tips 1)*.**

**You’ll remember that ‘R’ stands for response, and can also serve as the conclusion of your essay. You should be aiming to contain the following ion your final paragraph:**

* What YOU think of each poem overall
* What you believe the significant similarities and differences between the poems are
* Your lasting impression of each poem (in the light of the area of focus in the question)

**Consider the following essay title:**

* **‘Compare the ways in which the poets present ideas about CHANGE and TIME in *Tissue* and one other poem from *Power and Conflict*.’**

**With a partner, in a small group, or on your own, think about how you would rate the following paragraph as a CONLUSION to this essay question:**

* **To conclude, both *Tissue* and *Kamikaze* explore changes over time. While Dharker, in *Tissue*, imagines ‘buildings’ changing into ‘paper’ and ‘your skin’ to show how time changes everything;  *Kamikaze* focuses more on the changing attitudes towards the pilot and father in the poem until ‘they treated him / as though he no longer existed.’**

**Now, while this reads like a perfectly good description, does it satisfy ALL of the bullet points under ‘Response’? Also think about whether it satisfies the top band descriptions that the examining board sets out:**

* Critical, exploratory comparison (AO1)
* Exploration of effects of writer’s methods on reader (AO2)
* Exploration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task (AO3)

**You should find that the first and third bullet points under ‘response’ are not really addressed, and neither are the first and third bullet points from the mark scheme.**

**TASK: RE-WRITE THE CONCLUSION, TRYING TO ADD A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO EITHER OR BOTH POEMS, AND BE SURE TO INCLUDE SOME REFERENCES TO HOW THE POEMS AFFECT THE READER IN BOTH CASES. COMPLETE YOUR CONCLUSION BY WRITING ABOUT THE LASTING IMPRESSION OF EACH POEM UPON THE READER.**

**The following words and phrases may help:**

**‘This beautiful, yet moving poem…’ ‘…subtle differences between the poems…’**

 **‘unusual yet haunting imagery’ ‘strange, yet lingering impression of…’**

 ***exam* TIPS 8**

**‘R’is for Response: Wrapping Up Your Essay**