

Unit 1

English Language and English






Section A: Personal Writing

Introduction to Personal Writing

Unit 1 is externally examined and is made up of two sections. The first section is Section A and it assesses **Personal Writing**.

Target skills

The target skills you will learn about in this Personal Writing section will enable you to:

-  write clearly and fluently
-  organise ideas in order to support the purpose
-  use an appropriate writing form
-  select language to engage the reader
-  use grammar, spelling and punctuation effectively

Assessment Objective

Your Assessment Objective in this Personal Writing section is: **AO4 Writing**

- i) Write clearly, effectively and imaginatively to engage the reader.
- ii) Use a style that matches vocabulary to purpose and audience.
- iii) Organise ideas/information logically into sentences and paragraphs.
- iv) Make use of language and structural features for effect.
- v) Use a range of sentence structures as well as punctuate and spell accurately.

Exam Question

The type of question you will be expected to answer in Section A: Personal Writing in the Unit 1 exam paper:

You will have 45 minutes in which to produce a single piece of writing on a given subject. The audience will be the examiner.

You can go to the Exam Practice section at the end of this book (pages XX and XX) for more practice.

1

Planning

Planning is central to success. It is the foundation of the writing process and it is even more important in the exam because you will have only 45 minutes to complete this section.

So what happens to this key practice when it comes to the actual exam? You are anxious; there is an overwhelming desire to ‘get stuck in’; you see others around you writing furiously so you panic and start before you have sorted out what you should actually be writing.

The 5–10 minutes you spend preparing **before** you begin to write is vital if you are to produce your best work.

The benefits of planning are:

- A piece of writing which has been planned nearly always achieves a higher mark in the exam.
- You will find it easier to write because you will not be trying to think about the direction of your piece at the same time as you are attempting to compose it in a fluent and interesting manner.
- You will have all your ideas written down before you begin – therefore you won’t forget them as you are writing.
- You will be able to group your ideas together and organise them clearly and coherently.
- The ideas you decide to present will be more likely to be relevant and will directly link to the title of the writing task.
- You will be able to plan the writing techniques that you will use in particular paragraphs so that you demonstrate variety and maintain interest.

Use the following sample task in order to explore the planning processes that will help you to tackle the demands of personal writing in an organised and appropriate manner.

Sample task



You have been asked to make a presentation to next year’s Year 8 students, telling them about your school and what they might expect next year. This talk will be given to groups of between 15 and 20 Year 7 students during an induction day for them in June.

How to plan the sample task

The first thing to do is to apply the ‘**Why?**’, ‘**What?**’ and ‘**Who?**’ questions.

Why?

*Why are you writing – what is the **purpose** of your writing?*

In this case you are preparing a speech in which you have to share your experience and advice about what your school is like.

Your task is to make next year’s Year 8 students aware of what they might expect – so you need to be reassuring in what you say and make their arrival in school next term seem a relatively painless affair.

What?

What is the **context** or situation?

For the purpose of this task you are a mature Year 11 or 12 student who is giving younger children, who are liable to be quite nervous, the benefit of your experience.

Who?

Who is your **audience**?

This talk is aimed at children aged about 11 years old but it is likely that some of your teachers will be present and that will also have a bearing on what you say.

The fact that these children are quite young will have an impact on the range of language you are likely to use. Your language needs to be chosen so that they understand you.

Once you have answered these questions the next step is to consider the content of your speech by initially making a list of ideas or points that you might want to include.

Three planning options follow – the bullet-point list, the spider diagram and the flow chart (see page XX for more planning options); which one you use is a matter of personal choice.

Bullet-point list

You might create the following list when planning your speech.

Subject: Settling into life in secondary school

- *memories of your own first day – humorous story/ stories*
- *the biggest differences in comparison to primary school*
- *asking for help if you get lost*
- *how to recognise the prefects*
- *how the school day is structured*
- *how to address your teachers*
- *how teachers will address students*
- *assembly – what happens*
- *your 'best bits'*
- *registration*
- *lockers and bags*
- *opportunity for them to ask questions or speak to you when the talk is over.*

ACTIVITY 1

In pairs:

- 1** Discuss how you might usefully combine some of the points in the bullet-point list.
- 2** Place them in the order that you would choose to use them in your speech – feel free to add further ideas of your own.
- 3** Note down your revised plan and be prepared to justify your decisions!

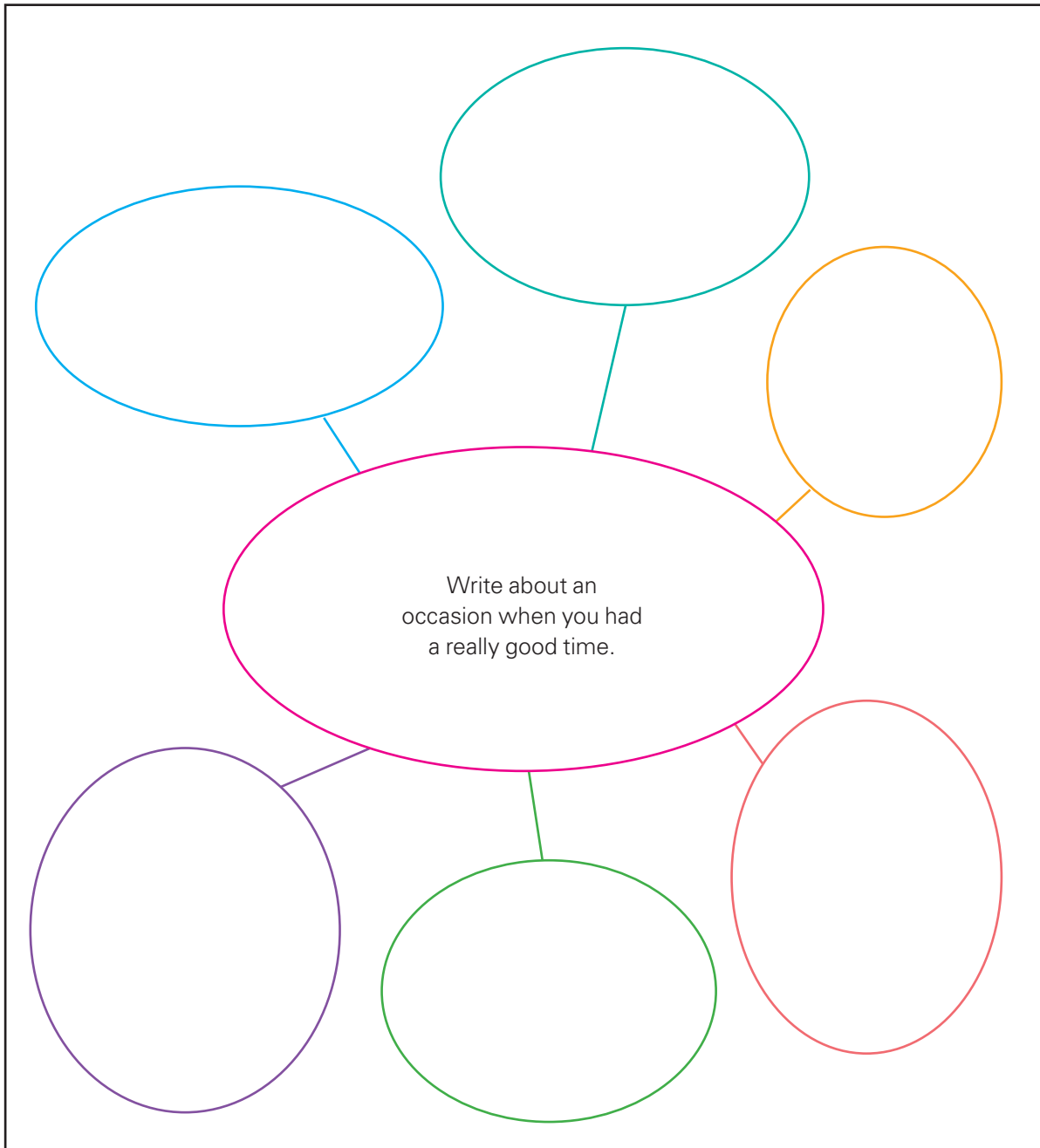
The process of making this list is useful because it allows you to identify all of the points you want to cover. Next you need to group ideas together and place them in the order in which you want to include them.

Spider diagram

- Write the subject ‘Settling into life in secondary school’ in a bubble in the middle of a page. Then add outer bubbles, labelling each with a different aspect of your subject. List ideas under each heading – just one or two ideas for each heading.
- Number the bubbles in the order you want to write your ideas. When the planning is done, you would then go on to expand your ideas into sentences, which would then form paragraphs. You would probably write a separate paragraph for each bubble.

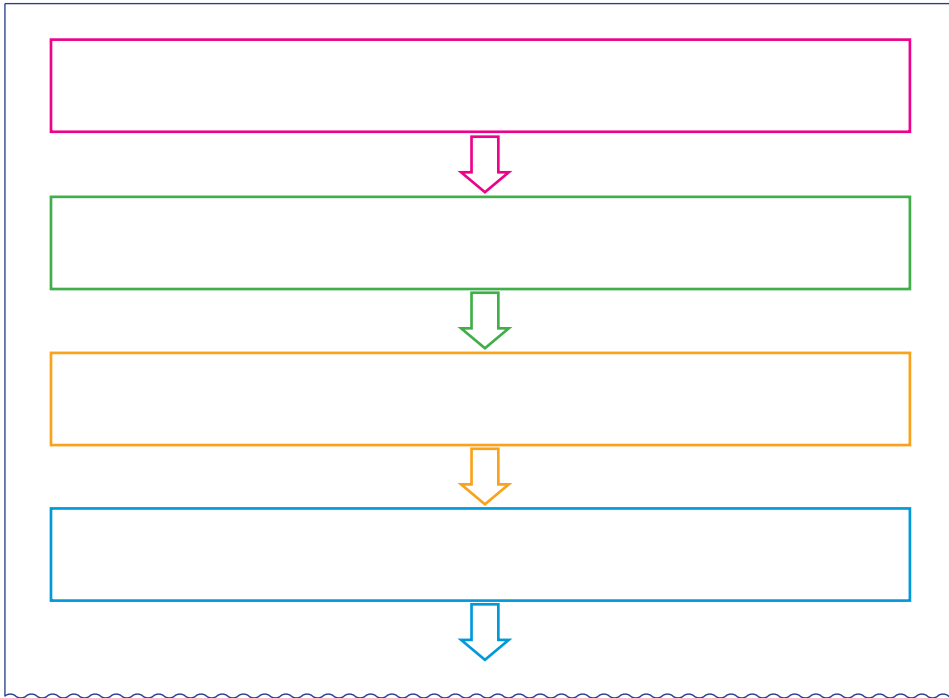
ACTIVITY 2

Create and fill out a spider-diagram plan using the title provided:



Flow chart

If you prefer, you could use a flow chart to plan your writing:



ACTIVITY 3

Create a flow-chart plan for the following task:

A magazine aimed at teenagers is inviting its readers to send in accounts of events that have had a significant effect on their lives. Write the piece you would send in.

Regardless of the type of approach you take, the key to successful writing is to plan!

All plans should:

- include the points which will be included in the writing task – aim for six as a rough target
- note the points and then number them to get the best order
- identify the writing techniques that you will use throughout the writing task, especially at the beginning and the end
- identify the structure of the writing
- be brief – write in note form and use key words – no lengthy sentences and no paragraphs!

2

Using an Appropriate Form of Writing

As well as planning, you will also need to consider what form is appropriate for your writing. To do this, think about what the **purpose** of your writing is.

- Are you being invited to inform the reader?
- Are you being asked to explain something?
- Does the task require you to describe a place or perhaps a situation?

When you have sorted out the purpose, decide what **form** your writing will take. Will it be:

- a letter
- a magazine article
- a speech
- a diary
- an essay – a story or account?

ACTIVITY 4

In pairs, discuss and note down the key characteristics or features of each of these forms of writing. Be prepared to share these with your class and note down any important features that you missed.



Who is the **audience** for your writing? This is very important because it will set the tone for the piece of writing and you will need to choose words and phrases that are appropriate for your audience. The audience could be:

- Year 8 or Year 12 students
- classmates/parents
- a specific person – for example, a friend
- the examiner.

ACTIVITY 5

As a class, briefly discuss what impact each of these audiences would have on your choice of language and tone.

ACTIVITY 6

Identify the **purpose**, **form** and **audience** for the writing questions below. Use this example to help you:

The audience will be a mixture of students, parents, staff and interested local people like past students.

The form

You have been selected to write **an article** for the **school magazine** on **one of your personal highlights from the last school year.**

The purpose is to describe these experiences in an entertaining way.

- 1 You are making a presentation to your classmates. Select a particular interest or hobby that you have. Explain how your interest has developed and why it is important to you.
- 2 Write a review of a place you know and really like for a travel website. Describe why people should choose this place to go on holiday.

Once you have identified the purpose, form and audience of the two writing questions above, write five paragraphs for each question. Remember to:

- ✓ demonstrate that you are aware of the specified audience
- ✓ use suitable opening and concluding paragraphs that show that you recognise their purpose in that particular type of writing
- ✓ use appropriate and convincing development to hold the audience's interest
- ✓ make sure the writing is lively and engaging
- ✓ use convincing, descriptive language – it adds interest
- ✓ include examples and anecdotes to add interest, realism and a personal voice
- ✓ possibly use humour – if it's appropriate
- ✓ use rhetorical devices to hold the audience's attention.

3

Structuring Your Writing

Openings

Openings set the tone for everything that follows. Always try to begin with a powerful opening line to grab the reader's attention. For example, you could use:

- an exclamation, e.g. 'Never, ever again!'
- a question, e.g. 'When was the last time you were really glad to see a teacher?'
- a rhetorical question, e.g. 'Does anyone like the dentists?'
- a quotation, e.g. "'Only dull people are bright in the morning" according to Oscar Wilde. He's right!'
- an intriguing statement, e.g. 'Marley was dead: to begin with.'
- a shocking fact, e.g. 'Over 50% of Londoners have never spoken to their neighbours.'
- an anecdote from your own experience, e.g. 'Only last week I was ...'
- a general statement, e.g. 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . .'
- a direct appeal to the audience, e.g. 'If you have a brother or sister then you will know how really annoying...'

ACTIVITY 7

Below are a series of openings. In pairs discuss which you think are engaging and which are not. Be prepared to justify your decisions.

- 1 I am going to write about the worst day of my life . . .
- 2 I'm sure you have all heard the expression 'getting out on the wrong side of the bed in the morning' ...
- 3 I am going to tell you about the day I went to see my granny. It was a Thursday and the sun was shining ...



- 4 The piercing 6:30am alarm jarred me out of a restful sleep. It didn't get any better after that!

ACTIVITY 8

Write **three** interesting and lively opening statements that you could use to begin a piece of writing called 'A Really Good Time'. Be prepared to share these with the rest of the class.

As a class, decide which of the openings are most effective and why.

Chronological structure

This means organising your writing by relating events chronologically – in the order in which they happened.

You might use chronological structure if you are writing about:

- an important aspect of your life or important events and people that have shaped you
- several events – you can trace how you were involved or how your interest developed by describing the events very briefly
- a single event or person – you could focus on that one event and recount it hour by hour, or focus on the life events of the person you are describing.

When writing chronologically, make sure you:

- keep the reader aware of the order of events and keep the story generally moving forward – gloss over the dull bits and don't tell more of the story than you need to make your point
- start and end with the action and have everything take place within the context of the story
- describe events, people and places in specific, colourful terms
- make sure that you constantly use rhetorical techniques.

Here is an example of chronological writing:

A twinge of excitement pulsed through my body that night. I don't know how I slept but I did. When I awoke I was refreshed but it wasn't long before I found my mind swarming with jumbled exhilaration. After a quick breakfast . . .

Flashback structure

You can use flashback in different ways to structure your writing.

You could start with the present and cut to the past before ending with the present again. Jennifer Johnston uses this approach in her book *How Many Miles to Babylon?*

It opens:

Because I am an officer and a gentleman they have given me my notebooks, pen, ink and paper.

and finishes:

Because I am an officer and a gentleman they have not taken away my bootlaces or my pen, so I sit and wait and write.

You could also begin and end your writing with two halves of the same event. The middle might give an interpretation of or background to the event. Suppose, for example, you are writing about a memorable occasion, such as your surprise 16th birthday party, and you decide to describe in detail the moment when you blew out your candles as everyone sang, 'Happy Birthday'. You could:

- begin your piece with the first lines of ‘Happy Birthday’
- cut to the beginning of the day, when you woke up completely unaware of the party to come
- describe what you did that day, including the puzzling things that happened because your family were keeping the party a secret
- describe arriving at the party and being completely surprised
- describe how everything then made sense
- describe the party itself
- end with the last lines of ‘Happy Birthday’ or the words ‘Make a wish!’

Conclusions

Conclusions are an extremely important part of any writing. Often students find it difficult to write conclusions as they run out of ideas by the time they get to the end! However, conclusions should not be overlooked. They:

- complete the reading experience for the reader
- leave the reader with a lasting impression
- sum up the main point of a piece of writing
- help you to stay on task.

Your conclusion needs to show that you have purposefully brought your piece of work to an end, rather than leaving the reader with the feeling that you have run out of time. Equally, don’t go over everything again; this is boring.

Remember that the conclusion is the last part of your writing that the examiner will read therefore it should be engaging and interesting in order to leave a positive and lasting impression.

When you write your conclusion, avoid:

- beginning with the cliché ‘In conclusion . . .’
- making your main point(s) in the conclusion – you should have made them during your writing
- including evidence to support your previous points – you should have done this as you made your points.

Strategies for writing an effective conclusion

Try using one or more of the following strategies to help you write an effective conclusion.

Full circle strategy

You could refer again to the theme or themes that you explored in your introduction. For example, if you began by describing a scenario, you could end with the same scenario. You might use the same key ideas or images that you used in the introduction. These first and last paragraphs of a piece of writing below are an example of this approach:

As I stepped out of the car I took time to look around and I have to admit that I felt apprehensive. The large, grey building towered over me and the windows seemed like eyes glaring at me as I made my way towards the door. . . .

...

My first day at school had been much more enjoyable than I had thought it would be. It was time to go home. As I walked down the school drive I looked back and felt a warm feeling inside. I knew everything would be all right.

Make the reader think strategy

You could make a **statement** or ask a **rhetorical question** to encourage the reader to think about their own life or think in a different way. Here a **statement** is used:

Thus, my personal experience challenges us all to think about our past, present and future.

Here a **rhetorical question** delivers a challenging conclusion:

As a school it is our duty to progress so that those who follow will enjoy the best educational experience possible. They deserve it, don't they?

Predictions strategy

You may want to make predictions for the future based on the topic of the piece. In other words, you could raise further questions linked to the topic, like this:

Unless we change our ways dramatically and quickly it will be too late to reverse these global changes. If the situation continues in this way, the future for generations to come will be bleak.

Pull it all together strategy

You could include a brief summary of the main points that you have made. Be careful with this approach as you can end up repeating everything again in a longwinded fashion. Keep it brief! For example:

Evidently my Grandad is important to me because of his kind heart, sense of humour, sense of pride and his unwavering support of me over the years.



Use a quotation strategy

You could use a quotation linked to the subject, a well-known phrase that ties in or perhaps even a quote from someone related to the subject:

It is therefore clear that the old adage 'an eye for an eye' is not one which is applicable to the 21st century.

ACTIVITY 9

Write two engaging conclusions that use two of the strategies outlined on the left. The conclusions should be for a piece of writing called 'A Really Good Time'.

Be prepared to share your conclusions with the rest of the class. As a class decide which of the conclusions are the most effective and why.

4 Editing Tips



The last 5 minutes spent reviewing and editing your writing could make that all-important difference to your final grade. Reviewing and revising your writing is one of the best ways to maximise your performance.

Examiners are impressed by students who correct their work, so don't be afraid to cross things out and make changes: it shows you are a thoughtful writer.

Make sure you keep changes readable and make your corrections clear.

Check your writing to get the best possible mark:

- ✓ Does it make **sense**?
- ✓ Have I included **full stops**, **semicolons** and **commas**? Also check for speech marks, colons, question marks and apostrophes.



- ✓ Could I **vary** the sorts of **sentences** I've used? Could I reorder some sentences to make them more descriptive and detailed?

- ✓ Do any of the words I've written look as though they're not quite right? If so, try writing them again on rough paper, **spelling** them differently; keep trying until they look right and then correct them in your work.







- ✓ Have I divided my work into **paragraphs**? If not, read it carefully and decide where you think the breaks ought to go. Mark // where you want to end a paragraph and then **NP**. This will tell the examiner that you want to begin a new paragraph.

Have I **included all that I wanted** to say? If not, mark the place where you want to add something with an asterisk *, make the same mark at the end of your piece, where you have some space, and then write the points or ideas you wish to add by the second mark. If you want to add extra point or ideas somewhere else use a different mark, such as **. Do not make than one or two additions: otherwise your work will begin to appear unplanned!







Matching grades to writing

In Section A the essential qualities the examiners will be looking for are highlighted at the important grade boundaries. Read over these descriptions carefully; they tell you what your answer should be like.

Grade C writing displays:

-  development that holds the reader's attention
-  an appropriate sense of audience and purpose
-  clearly structured and increasingly fluent expression
-  a series of sentence structures, competently handled
-  accurate use of basic punctuation that makes the meaning clear
-  generally accurate spelling and the use of a widening range of language

Grade A/A* writing displays:

-  development that is sophisticated and commands the reader's attention
-  a sense of a positive relationship with the audience
-  an assured use of structure and a confident style
-  sentence structuring that enhances the overall effect
-  a range of punctuation, confidently employed to enhance fluency
-  accurate spelling and use of an extended vocabulary – errors tend to be one-off mistakes

ACTIVITY 10

Here is a sample writing task:

Write a speech to be delivered to your classmates in which you tell them about the most worthwhile experience you ever had.

The answer on page XX was written under exam conditions by a student of your age. The examiner's comments have been added to help you recognise the key strengths of the work.

Take ten minutes to read it over and look closely at the examiner's comments.

- 1** Do the examiner's comments fairly represent the quality of the work?
- 2** Do any of these remarks surprise/puzzle you?

Clear use of chronological structuring that engages the audience in the situation

Complex sentence used to open this paragraph. Engaging use of humour with the 'little miracles'. Lively finish with the detail of the purple-faced screaming child.

More humour in evidence as the list of sources of possible names is related. There is an attempt to further engage the audience with the question to end the paragraph.

Having been told what to expect the event is now relayed in detail.

A short reflective one-sentence paragraph.

Fellow classmates, I am going to tell you about the most worthwhile experience I've had – hearing my little sister first say my name.

It all began on the sixth of October 2006. My brother and I were staying at our granny's when she received (sp) the call saying that Dad would come and pick us up, we were going to the hospital to see our new baby sister.

When we walked into the ward, as you can imagine, we were deafened by the sound of crying babies, exhausted mothers, and family members cooing over the 'little miracles'. As we walked cautiously up to my mother's bed, we could see our little sister was no different – in fact she was almost purple in the face she was screaming so loudly!

However, that all stopped the minute my mother scooped her up in her arms and cuddled her. I remember thinking that she looked so small and fragile that I was scared to hold her, but my Dad encouraged me to 'go on' and so I climbed carefully up beside my mum and waited as she was gently placed into my arms by my Dad. My first thought as I held her was 'She's not as light as she looks' – in fact she weighed a tonne!

Then my mum made the dreadful mistake of asking my brother and I what she should be called and seconds later we were shouting out the names of our favourite singers, childhood novels and even our favourite TV chefs, I'm sure she regretted the decision, wouldn't you??

It wasn't until we were hushed and told 'there are babies sleeping', although from the noise they were making I was sure my dad was going slightly deaf, that my aunt suggested the name 'Flora'. We all agreed on this, and one year later she was crawling on the kitchen floor, on the very same day that she uttered my name.

On a hot June day, I was sitting at the kitchen table drinking the most delicious lemonade you have ever tasted. My mother and I had just started discussing in depth why Tracy from CBBC got her own mobile phone yet I didn't, when Flora suddenly came over to me and pointed. Then she said 'Sue' in that child like way she had. I felt so amazed and shocked that I asked her to repeat what she said.

This was the most worthwhile experience because it showed me that even the best things can happen unexpectedly.

So while I remember that day like it was yesterday, now Flora is nine years old and she never stops talking and saying my name, so I'm sure you can imagine, the novelty has definitely (sp) worn off!!

Purpose and audience clearly highlighted, as well as the topic to be described.

Positive development of interest through precisely selected vocabulary – 'scooped up into her arms' and use of personal feelings. Lively and entertaining reflection on child's weight at the end.

A humorous, complex sentence opens the paragraph and moves the story along. Dramatic jump forward in time neatly takes the story towards its climax.

Another neat jump forward in time to the present finishes off the speech on a lively and humorous note.

This answer demonstrates:

- ✓ confident awareness of purpose and audience
- ✓ a developing, confident style
- ✓ deliberate manipulation of a range of sentence structures
- ✓ some extended use of vocabulary.

Personal Writing: Key to success

Read these key pointers and then complete the exam-style question below:

- Your own experiences will provide you with the best sources for a piece of personal writing that has to be completed in a short period of time.
- The best writing results from the following process: Think, Plan, Write. Resist the temptation to start immediately; taking the time to think and plan is essential to produce your best work.
- Make your writing lively and engaging. Let your personality come through in the writing – the last thing the examiner wants is to read something dull!
- Remember you have only 45 minutes in which to complete the writing process.
- There are no prizes for finishing first so use all of the time wisely – the only reward for finishing early could be a low grade if you do not make the most of the time available.
- Review your finished work – you must review your work to get the most out of your answer because when you are working quickly and under pressure everyone makes mistakes. Remember too that there are no marks for extreme neatness – it is much better that your work is accurate and contains a few corrections. Check your work for the following common mistakes and correct any that you find:
 - i) Have you paragraphed the essay?
 - ii) Did you use a range of sentence lengths?
 - iii) Did you vary the sentence openings?
 - iv) Have you used a varied vocabulary?
 - v) As you re-read your work, check for words that have been left out or for sentences where the meaning is less than clear.

Exam-style question

Write about an occasion when you were really pleased with yourself!

Response time: 45 minutes



Checklist for success: working towards Grade C	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Have you shown understanding of the purpose and structure of the task?	
Have you shown maintained/awareness of the reader/intended audience ?	
Does the content fit the purpose ?	
Is the piece paragraphed and does each paragraph have a topic sentence ?	
Have you used some stylistic devices (rhetorical questions, emotive language, etc.) that are in keeping with the purpose and audience?	
Is there a range of appropriate vocabulary used to create effect?	
Is there appropriate variety in the sentence structures ?	
Is there clear punctuation and is it used to vary pace and clarify meaning?	
Have you checked your spelling ?	

Checklist for success: working towards Grade A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does your writing show an understanding of the purpose and is your writing structured appropriately?	
Have you shown an ongoing awareness of the reader/intended audience ?	
Is the content coverage detailed , and fitting for the purpose ?	
Have you made sure the paragraphs have a topic sentence ?	
Have you used a range of stylistic devices (rhetorical questions, emotive language, etc.) adapted to purpose and audience?	
Is there a wide range of appropriate, extended vocabulary and is it used to create effect or convey precise meaning?	
Is there confident and effective variation of sentence structures , use of simple, compound and complex sentences to achieve particular effects?	
Is there accurate punctuation used to vary pace, clarify meaning, avoid ambiguity and create deliberate effects?	
Is virtually all spelling , including that of complex irregular words, correct?	