

Essay Mark Scheme

How to Use This Mark Scheme

I designed this mark scheme to show you how I mark my essays and why. Here at Shani’s Tutoring, I do not strictly follow the mark scheme of any particular exam board. Instead, I have combined all the assessment objectives of all exam boards with the government’s National Curriculum and my own tutoring experience to give you a detailed summary of what you need to do in your essays.

The baseline total for your essay is **300**. However, if your essay is comparative, you can gain an additional 100 marks (you compare the similarities and differences between two or more texts). That brings your total up to **400** marks.

This total is much higher than what you might have come to expect in your GCSE or A-level exams. There is an excellent reason for this. I have split the mark scheme into smaller, manageable chunks that identify what you need to work on.

This is helpful for both teachers and students alike. As students, it gives you detailed grades for each section of the assessment criteria. You can see how well you did in each area (e.g., spelling or close analysis) and use this information to cut down your revision by focussing on the things you really need to work on. It means that marking is much easier for us teachers, and we don’t have to worry about being too harsh or too kind.

I do not give out A-level or GCSE grades for the essays I mark. Instead, I have my own grading system with A1 as the strongest and U as the weakest. I have provided an **approximate** equivalent for GCSE or A-level in the table on the right, but this cannot replace your teacher’s predicted grades. It is just here for you to get an idea of where you are and how you can improve.

Please see the table on the right for the grade equivalent.

Total Marks	Tutoring Grade	Approximate Equivalent*	
285-300	A1	A*	A-Level
271-285	A2	A	A-Level
256-270	A3	B	A-Level
241-255	B1	C	A-Level
226-240	B2	D	A-Level
211-225	B3	9	GCSE
196-210	C1	8	GCSE
181-195	C2	7	GCSE
166-180	C3	6	GCSE
151-165	D1	5	GCSE
136-150	D2	4	GCSE
121-135	D3	3	GCSE
106-120	E1	2	GCSE
91-105	E2	1	GCSE
76-90	E3	Requires more work for a GCSE or A-level grade.	
61-75	F1		
46-60	F2		
31-45	F3		
16-30	G		
0-15	U		

**Please be aware: this is only an approximate equivalent to the UK system. It is based on extensive research of the GCSE and A-level mark schemes and the government’s National Curriculum. I have provided it to help you understand roughly what level you are working at. It is not there to undermine or replace the grades of your teachers, nor is it there as a predicted grade or guarantee that you will achieve those results. To err on the side of caution, these grade boundaries are on the harsher side of what you might experience in your exams.*

Essay Mark Scheme

There are four main categories laid out in this mark scheme:

- Understanding of the Text
- Formulating an Argument
- Writing Coherently
- SPaG

These four areas are essential to consider when writing an English essay. They are split into “Areas of Focus”, which are subcategories that all come with their own marks.

I have done this to help you better understand where your marks are going and why. I have used many different mark schemes from many different exam boards in my time tutoring since 2015. In that time, I have noticed how grouped together the marks are. That might be great for the final exam, but when you’re just practising, it can be tough for you to isolate precisely what you need to work on!

Let’s take the AQA GCSE Language Paper 1 mark scheme as an example. For Question 4, the “Skills Descriptors” – or the things you need to do to hit a specific grade boundary – group critical analysis, understanding the writer’s intentions, using quotes as references, and many other things all into one box!

What happens if you choose great quotes but aren’t so good with the whole close analysis thing? How would you know what to work on based on a grade out of 20? It doesn’t split these things up into independent grades, so unless you have a teacher who goes into detail when giving you feedback, you could end up feeling very confused and overwhelmed.

These exam board mark schemes are helpful for actual exams where examiners need to mark quickly. They are even good for mock exams – since they’re basically there to tell you how well you would do if you sat your exams right then. However, for day-to-day practice, they aren’t great.

That’s where the Shani’s Tutoring mark scheme comes in. With each essay that I mark, you will find an attached sheet that tells you exactly what you need to work

on so that you can arrange your study time more effectively. The areas that need the most improvement will be highlighted for your convenience.

For example, let’s look at that scenario I mentioned before: you are good at finding appropriate quotes, but your close analysis needs some work. In that case, your “Evidence” mark will be high, and your “Close Analysis” areas will be lower. In fact, you even have two separate grades for language analysis and structure analysis! Now you know exactly what to work on!

About the Shani’s Tutoring Grading System

So, why did I make the Shani’s Tutoring grading system the way it is?

Well, I knew I wanted to make a grading system that was flexible enough to be used for both GCSEs and A-levels. The purpose was twofold. First of all, I didn’t want to knock an A-level student’s confidence if they got lower than a D. After all, so many students have had huge gaps in their learning in the past few years! Instead, they could see their progress against a GCSE grade rather than just writing their grades off as a failure.

I also want to reward students who are achieving way higher than a 9 in their GCSEs. Many GCSE-level students write fantastically, and their effort should be noticed. Showing them that they are already working to an A-level standard will motivate them to keep working hard and even consider taking English for 6th form and beyond!

I chose to use the letter-number system so that I would not cause any confusion with the real grades you might receive. It is clear that an A1 is not the same as a 9 at GCSE, so I can give out grades without causing confusion or misconception. Plus, I want to make sure every student gets a grade of A1, no matter how old you are! It will help you a great deal in the long run!

Please use the following guidelines to help you improve your grade. Make sure you keep trying hard!

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
<p><u>Showing Your Understanding</u></p> <p>This is the first category of the mark scheme because it is the first thing you need to do when planning your work. You can't write a good essay if you don't fully understand the question! Of course, formulating an argument is the most essential part of the essay. That is why it takes up the bulk of the marks. However, if you don't understand the text or the question, your argument will be meaningless. Your analysis won't make sense, your points will be off, and you'll lose way more marks than you need to.</p> <p>So, spend some time reading the text and the question before starting. Read it more than once if you have to. Take notes on the meaning. Highlight the most important words and phrases. This will help you to write a better response because your arguments will be on point. If you plan with the meaning in mind, you'll write a great essay.</p> <p>Total Marks: 90</p>		
<p>Understanding the Meaning and Purpose of the Text</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss why the writer has written the text. • Discuss what the writer is trying to say. • Explore how the writer portrays themes, characters, events, settings or other ideas in the text (based on the essay question). <p>For the highest marks, this needs to be done consistently throughout the essay, including your introduction and conclusion. You also need to use your understanding of the meaning and purpose to inform what you say in other areas of this mark scheme. For example, use it to pick your quotes and make your argument. Of course, misunderstanding the text will drop your marks here.</p>	<p>30</p>
<p>Effect on the Reader/Audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how the reader/audience might feel when reading the text. • Explore what the reader/audience might think when reading the text. • Show an understanding of the difference between the writer's intentions and reader/audience interpretations. • Discuss how different audiences/readers might interpret the text differently, including how reactions to and readings of a text change over time. • Understand that writers don't write for no reason. They do it to affect the reader/audience in some way. <p>Make sure you do this consistently throughout your essay for the highest marks. It needs to be in every section of your work, including the introduction and conclusion. Link it to your points and close analysis. How does the writer use words to affect the reader/audience? How would the reader/audience respond to the text's themes, events, characters, settings, and other ideas? What did they want the reader/audience to think deeply about? Why?</p>	<p>35</p>

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
Understanding the Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use words in the question (or synonyms) in your response. This will keep you on track and show the examiner that you are writing an essay that actually answers the question. • Pick apart the words used to find their deeper meaning. Don't stick to the face-value meaning. Analyse the question, too! <p>For the highest marks, make sure that you link your understanding of the question to your point in each paragraph. For example, if the question asks you to explore how Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth, start the "point" section of each paragraph with "Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth as...". Of course, you can use synonyms and connectives to make the essay flow better.</p> <p>Be careful with essay questions that ask you to what extent you agree with a statement. Make sure that your introduction matches what you say later in the essay. For example, don't say "I agree to some extent" and then only include points that show you agree. "To some extent" means that you don't agree entirely, so you need to show why you said that later in your essay! If you can't think of any reason you might disagree, it is perfectly acceptable to say something like, "I entirely agree with this statement".</p>	10
Links to Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how a reader/audience's reaction to a text might be influenced by the historical period. • Explore the contemporary and historical events that influence the text's content, language, meaning, and message. • Understand how words can change meanings over time. • Consider how the writer's views and experiences might have an impact on the text. <p>For the best marks, tie these links to context back to reader/audience reactions. How would the readers/audience of the time have reacted to the text? What would they expect? Would the text subvert their expectations in any way? Is the text a parody of the way people acted at that time? Is the writer using the text to comment on the society of their time?</p>	15
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Formulating an Argument</u></p> <p>This is the most important part of your essay. Essays are all about making an argument and using evidence to back up your ideas! That's why this category is worth the most marks. You need to make sure that you can write critically so that you can convince the examiner to see things your way.</p> <p>This category will make up the bulk of your main body. You need to make clear, logical points, back them up with evidence and then closely analyse the evidence to see if you can pick apart any deeper interpretations. As long as you understand the text and formulate a good argument, you are on the right track. The other two categories will then help you to clean things up.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Total Marks: 120</p>		

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split your main argument into at least three points. • Stick to one point per paragraph in the main body of your essay. • All the evidence and close analysis in a paragraph links to its point. • The points you make in your essay come together to form the main argument. <p>To get the highest marks in this, make sure that your points are clear and make sense. Also, make sure that there is a lot that you can say about each of those points. I recommend following the PETAL structure to help you boost your marks. Don't be afraid to expand this, though. It is a good idea to have more than one piece of evidence to back up your point.</p>	15
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence is concise. Don't quote a whole sentence if you can. Pick out the most important information. • Each point has multiple pieces of evidence to back it up. • Choose the best evidence to match and enlighten your point. • Choose evidence that you can pick apart for close analysis. • Never change the quotes, even if they have spelling or grammatical errors. Present them as they are. <p>Evidence is essential, so make sure that you select it appropriately and use it as much as possible. More advanced essays embed the quotes without saying things like "this is shown in the quote...". However, if you can't find another way to present the evidence, don't worry about it! You are not going to lose marks for writing that. It's just that it takes less time and feels more professional if you embed the quotes.</p>	30
Close Language Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Zoom in" to certain words or short phrases in your evidence. • Pick apart the subtext and alternate meanings of those words. • Discuss the connotations of the words used. • Explore how the words might make the reader/audience think and feel. • Discuss why the writer has chosen to use those words. • Don't define a quote. The point of close analysis is <i>not</i> to translate from English to English. <p>Remember that the writer could have chosen to use a synonym. So, it is essential that you think about why they chose that word in particular. What is the significance of their language choices? Also, make sure that you analyse as much of your evidence as possible. Your use of close analysis must be consistent throughout the main body of your essay. You don't need to do any close analysis in your introduction or conclusion, though.</p>	40

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
Analysis of Text's Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore how the text is organised: what happens in the beginning, middle and end? How does this impact the reader/audience? If the extract you are discussing is part of a larger text, consider what happens before and after to intrigue the reader/audience. Consider the role that this particular extract plays in the whole text. Think about how the writer uses breaks in paragraphs, scenes or chapters to create and build tension. <p>It is important to consider why the text is arranged the way it is. Remember that writers don't do anything by accident. They read their text multiple times to make edits and revisions. That ensures that things are exactly the way they want them to be. So, you can be assured that the structure of the text is done on purpose.</p>	20
Subject Terminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name the literary devices (including poetic and persuasive devices) that the writer uses in the quotes you picked. If there are no literary devices, identify the word classes used (verb, adjective, etc.). <p>For the best marks, make sure you do this for every quote that you use in your essay. This is one of the easiest ways to increase your marks, so make sure you brush up on your literary devices. Of course, you need to make sure you use the correct terms, as you can't get marks for using the wrong name for a term.</p>	15
<p><u>Writing Coherently</u></p> <p>You must present your arguments in a clear, understandable way. This is important, as you need to ensure that the examiner understands what you are trying to say. This category is all about making sure that the examiner understands what you're trying to say and can follow your argument from start to end.</p> <p>Total Marks: 50</p>		
Essay Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include an introduction that outlines what the essay will cover, the main ideas and your argument. Include a conclusion that powerfully reinforces your opinions and shows how your points come together to form your argument. Use multiple paragraphs in the main body of your essay. Use a new paragraph every time you introduce a new idea, point or argument. Utilise connectives to tie together different ideas and show how they are linked. <p>Essay structure is essential to help the examiner understand what you are trying to say. If the structure is unclear, all your good points can get lost! For the best marks, plan your essay beforehand. Arrange your points so that they move on from one to another smoothly. Plus, it will help you to stick to the same argument throughout the essay.</p>	20

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
Clarity of Written Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't overcomplicate your language. It is good to use high-level vocabulary, but don't let that get in the way of making sense. • Be concise. Don't spend too long trying to make one single point. It is always better to use simpler language if that means you can say more with fewer words. • Only use words if you are 100% sure of what they mean and how to use them. <p>Make sure that the examiner understands what you are trying to say at all times. Often, this means keeping your language as simple as possible and only sprinkling in high-level (low-frequency) vocabulary where it is appropriate. If in doubt, stick to the words you know. It is much more important to write in a way that can be easily understood than to sound intelligent by using big words.</p>	20
Appropriate Register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid contractions (like “don't”, “can't”, or “you're”). Instead, use the full words (“do not”, “cannot”, and “you are”). • Keep your language formal. That means avoiding slang and colloquialisms at all times (unless you are quoting the text). • Stick to the third person. Do not speak directly to the examiner using the second person “you,” and avoid writing about yourself in the first person as much as possible. <p>It can be tempting to say, “In this essay, I will...” to explain the point and message of your writing. That is fine. However, if you make your opinion clear in your introduction, you shouldn't need to explicitly tell the examiner what you are going to do. That should be pretty obvious. It is much more convincing to stick to the third person and present your arguments as if they are the only logical way to see the text. If the essay's argument is clear, saying, “In this essay, I will...” is just a waste of words and time.</p>	10
<p><u>SPaG</u></p> <p>SPaG stands for “Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar”. Combined with vocabulary, it is the final category in this mark scheme. It ties the whole essay together because it ensures that your answer makes sense and can be easily read.</p> <p>Total Marks: 40</p>		
Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all words in your essay are spelt correctly. • Remember that there are different spelling variants of words from different parts of the world. If you are spelling in British English, stick to it. Don't suddenly fall into Americanisms. The same applies the other way around. Consistency is important. • Check your essay thoroughly for any silly mistakes. <p>It is natural to spell one or two words wrong every now and then. However, spelling common words wrong will lose you many marks.</p>	10

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
Punctuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always use speech marks when quoting the text or any other source. • Keep your punctuation consistent. If you use single speech marks (inverted commas) to quote the text, don't suddenly switch to double speech marks. • Use full stops and commas where necessary. Don't let sentences run on for too long without a pause, and don't cut them off too quickly before forming a whole idea. • Use other punctuation where necessary. <p>Remember that the point of punctuation is to help us read a text and understand what it is trying to say. Different types of punctuation help to signpost various purposes and meanings to the reader. After all, examiners can't hear the way you say words or what you do with your body language when you talk, so they need other clues to understand the meaning.</p> <p>For example, speech marks help us to know when the writer is quoting someone or something else. Full stops help us understand when one thought has ended and the other is beginning. Apostrophes can show us ownership ("Shani's Tutoring" means that the tutoring is owned by Shani), or it could be there to tell us that letters are missing in contractions. Brackets add extra information.</p>	10
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that you use the correct tenses in your essay and stick to the same tense throughout. Don't switch between past, present and future tense for no reason. • Make sure that the words in your sentence agree with each other. For example: "They were" not "They was". • Avoid sentence fragments. Make sure that all your sentences have a subject and a verb. • Make sure that your sentences make sense. <p>Grammar is all about how words come together to make meaning. Ensure that you are saying what you are trying to say by checking your essay for grammar once you have written it. In an exam, leave at least 5 minutes at the end to check for any mistakes.</p>	10
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ambitious, high-level vocabulary when you can. • Make sure that you use all words properly and understand their meanings fully. • Vary your vocabulary. Ensure that you aren't just using the same words throughout your essay. Use different connectives and other words to keep your writing fresh and exciting. <p>The best practice for this is sticking to no more than two ambitious words per sentence. This ensures that your work does not seem too pretentious and you don't lose the meaning by overdoing it on the big words.</p>	10

Comparative Essays

You will be presented with a **comparative** essay at some point in your English studies. They are standard for both exams *and* coursework and require you to point out the similarities and differences between the two (or more) texts. If you would like me to mark a comparative essay for you, there are an additional **100 marks** that you could get, bringing your total possible marks up to **400**.

Remember to focus on the similarities before going into the differences. You don't want to just point out everything that one text does differently from the other. Sure, they might have completely different writers, plots, and titles. However, those are the boring things to point out that won't earn you many marks. Instead, try to focus on broad things that the texts have in common. Then you can use those broad things to jump off and explore more nuanced differences.

For example, you don't want to spend all your time talking about how one text is about an adventure in the Himalayan Mountains while another is about going to the park. That kind of similarity doesn't mean a whole lot. It's just too obvious, so you can't get many marks for it. Instead, you might want to focus on how both texts explore going to new places and trying new things. Then, you can go into the differences between how the texts portray those themes.

Comparative essays can take some time to understand. At first, they might feel tricky or even pointless! For some of us, it's not natural to fixate on one or two small similarities that two texts might have. However, with enough practice and hard work, you will be fine! This mark scheme is here to guide you and determine if you're on the right track. Just make sure to get lots of feedback.

I have split this part of the mark scheme into four different areas:

- Comparison of Content
- Comparison of Language
- Comparison of Structure
- Comparison of Meaning, Message and Purpose

This will help you to know exactly what you need to focus on since there are going to be loads of similarities and differences between the texts. You wouldn't be asked to compare them otherwise! It's not a good idea to get stuck on the surface-level content without exploring the similarities and differences between the deeper things like language and message. On the other hand, it's not a great idea to just focus on the language without establishing the bigger, broader differences either! You need to find a way to strike the right balance.

This essay mark scheme will help you. If you combine it with a great plan and an understanding of subject terminology, you'll be on the right track. Just make sure that you remember: a comparative essay is still an essay! Don't forget about the other areas of focus that I set out in the first part of this mark scheme! They will still matter! They still make up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the marks here on Shani's Tutoring! Just like for any other essay, I recommend the PETAL essay structure. It will help you loads!

I know that it sounds like a lot to do, but you can do it! I recommend doing a standard essay paragraph for the text you feel most comfortable with. Explore the language, structure and literary devices. Consider the writer's intentions. Think about how the reader/audience is made to feel and why. Do all the stuff you are expected to do in a regular essay. Then, in the following paragraph, compare the second text to the first. It's a good way to make sure that you fit in all the important stuff!

Of course, if your teacher has recommended a different system, please follow that. All exam boards are different. While I have taken that into account in my mark scheme, your teacher might have their own unique way to hit the specifications of that specific exam. Plus, they are the one marking your actual coursework, after all! They might even be giving you your final grade if there are issues with exams.

However, if your teacher hasn't recommended a particular structure or you feel stuck, this way to compare texts will work very well. I can vouch for it because I have used it myself – including for my university degree!

Good luck!

Area of Focus	Criteria	Marks
<p>Comparison of Content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify themes that the texts have in common. Compare and contrast how the writers portray these themes. • Discuss the similarities and differences between the scenes and settings in the texts. • Explore the similarities and differences between the characters in the texts. Are there any character archetypes or stereotypes that the texts share? Do they present characters with similar personalities or conflicts? • Discuss similarities and differences between the events of the text. <p>It will probably be easier for you to find similarities and differences between the content of your texts, so this is where you can get quick marks. Of course, there is much more to comparative essays than pointing out the content. However, there's no point in losing marks for forgetting the simple things!</p>	<p>15</p>
<p>Comparison of Language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast how the writers use language to explore their common themes. • Compare and contrast how the writers use language to describe the characters, events and settings. • Explore how both writers use language to make their readers/audiences feel. Are they similar in any way? How are they different? • Compare and contrast the literary devices that both writers use to portray their themes and messages. • Give evidence of these similarities and differences by using quotes. <p>It is still essential to think about how the writer <i>portrays</i> themes, characters and/or ideas in their writing. You should still think about <i>how</i> the language is being used to portray these things. However, you just need to make sure that your focus is on the similarities and differences between the portrayals between the themes.</p>	<p>40</p>
<p>Comparison of Structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the form of both texts (novel, play, etc.). Consider the genre. Are they similar? Are they different? How? • Discuss the similarities and differences between the structural features of both texts. E.g., flashbacks, sentence length, etc. • Compare the order of events in the texts and/or extracts of the texts you are discussing. Do they both have a large climax? Do the writers build tension in similar ways? Where is the rising action? Where does the action fall? • Consider how the structure of each text is used to affect the reader/audience. <p>The structure is the most difficult section to think about, and it isn't always easy to think about how you can fit it into the essay. If you need to compare two set extracts, you might want to think about the beginning, middle and end of each. Where do the writers put their paragraph breaks? Where do they have short sentences? What about long sentences? On the other hand, if you can talk about the entirety of the texts, think about how they begin and end. Think about how those things draw the reader/audience in and stick in their minds.</p>	<p>15</p>

<p>Comparison of Meaning, Message and Purpose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the themes, characters, settings and anything else the texts have in common. Explore how the writers portray these things and what message they are trying to send by portraying them this way. Are these messages similar or different? • Compare the purposes of these texts. Are both the writers trying to comment on a similar societal issue? Are they trying to make a similar statement? Or are their purposes different? • No text is written in a vacuum, and almost all writers add their political and/or social opinions into their work – whether they know it or not. Explore the similarities and differences between both texts’ political and social messages. • Explore the similarities and differences in the tones of both texts. Is one more positive than the other? Is one bitter? <p>This is the second most important thing to do when comparing texts in your essay. All writers write for a reason. All texts have messages, meanings and purposes. It’s up to you to unpick what these are for both texts and then highlight the similarities and differences. As with every other part of the comparative essay, I recommend starting with the broad similarities and then zooming into the subtler differences. This will help you to write an essay with the nuance you need.</p> <p>The purpose is an interesting thing to think about. People’s purposes for writing could be very different, even if the structures and forms of the texts are very similar. For example, a diary, a memoir and an autobiography will be written in very similar ways (first person, written after an event). However, they serve very different purposes. People writing diaries probably aren’t planning to have their work read by other people, so they will behave differently to those writing autobiographies.</p>	<p>30</p>
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