

O-Level English Language — Paper 1 (Writing) Notes

SECTION A — SITUATIONAL WRITING (15 marks)

[Format] Usually an email — sometimes a formal letter, report, or article, depending on the prompt.

[Task Structure]

- You're given a *scenario* (e.g., you're a student council member, class rep, event organiser)
- 3 bullet points telling you WHAT must be included in your response
- A short "visual text" / stimulus (poster, notice, infographic) to extract info from

[Marking Split]

- Content (up to 8 marks) → hitting all 3 bullet points with sufficient elaboration
- Language & Organisation (up to 7 marks) → register, tone, structure, accuracy

[Register/Tone — CRITICAL]

- Identify WHO you're writing to → determines formal vs semi-formal tone
 - Formal → Principal, teachers, unfamiliar adults, official bodies
 - Semi-formal → classmates, familiar juniors/seniors
- No contractions in formal register (don't → do not)
- No slang / exclamation marks in formal writing

[Email Format Checklist]

Subject: [clear, specific]

Dear [Name/Title],

¶1 → State purpose of email immediately

¶2-3 → Address each bullet point (own paragraph per point is safest)

¶Last → Polite closing / call to action

Yours sincerely / Yours faithfully,

[Your name]

[Content Rule of Thumb]

- Each bullet point needs: 1 direct answer + 1-2 sentences of elaboration/reason/detail
 - Don't just copy the stimulus text — paraphrase and expand in your own words
 - Address ALL bullet points — missing one caps your content marks hard
-

SECTION B — CONTINUOUS WRITING (35 marks)

You choose **ONE** out of usually 4 options (mix of picture-based and topic-based prompts).

[Types you may encounter]

Type	What it wants
Narrative	Tell a story — clear plot, characters, conflict, resolution
Descriptive	Paint a scene/experience — sensory detail, mood, atmosphere
Argumentative/Discursive	Take a stance or discuss both sides of an issue
Personal Recount	Real/realistic experience — reflection is key

[Marking Split]

- Content (up to ~13 marks) → relevance, development of ideas, engagement
 - Language (up to ~13 marks) → vocabulary range, sentence variety, accuracy
 - Organisation (up to ~9 marks) → structure, paragraphing, cohesion
-

NARRATIVE / PERSONAL RECOUNT STRUCTURE

[Shape] → Orientation → Rising action → Climax → Falling action → Resolution/Reflection

¶1 [Hook + Orientation]

- Start in medias res (mid-action) OR vivid scene-setting
- Establish who/where/when quickly

¶2-3 [Build-up / Rising Action]

- Introduce the conflict/challenge
- Build tension — use pacing (short sentences = urgency)

¶4 [Climax]

- Peak moment — most detailed, most sensory language here

¶5 [Resolution]

- Resolve the conflict
- End with reflection/insight (esp. for VIA/personal growth essays)

[Techniques to weave in]

- Show, don't tell → "My hands trembled" NOT "I was scared"
 - Sensory details (sight, sound, smell, touch) especially at climax
 - Dialogue to break up narration and reveal character
 - Varied sentence length for pacing control
 - Figurative language (metaphor/simile) — but don't force it
-

DESCRIPTIVE STRUCTURE

[Shape] → Organise spatially (near→far, top→bottom) OR by sense OR by time of day

¶1 [Overall impression / establishing shot]

¶2-4 [Zoom into specific elements — one focus per paragraph]

¶5 [Closing — tie back to mood/theme, or a final striking image]

[Key: mood consistency] — pick ONE dominant mood (e.g. nostalgic, eerie, joyful) and let word choice serve it throughout.

ARGUMENTATIVE / DISCURSIVE STRUCTURE

¶1 [Introduction]

- Hook + state the issue + your stance (thesis)

¶2-4 [Body — one point per paragraph]

- PEEL: Point → Explain → Example/Evidence → Link back to thesis
- For discursive (discuss both sides): alternate FOR/AGAINST, or present opposing view then rebut it

¶5 [Conclusion]

- Restate stance with fresh phrasing
- End with a broader implication/call to action

COMMON PITFALLS (both sections)

- [] Wrong register (too casual in formal email, or vice versa)
 - [] Missing/skipping a bullet point in Situational Writing
 - [] Narrative that's all plot, no reflection/emotion
 - [] Over-long introduction eating into climax/body development
 - [] Repetitive sentence starters (I..., I..., I...)
 - [] Weak conclusion that just repeats the intro word-for-word
-

QUICK PRE-SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

1. Does every paragraph have a clear purpose?
2. Have I varied my sentence openers and lengths?
3. Any repeated words I can swap for stronger vocabulary?
4. Correct tenses used consistently?
5. Register matches audience (Section A) / mood is consistent (Section B)?
6. Ending feels complete, not abrupt?