

## **Top tips for your creative writing and persuading with power**

**Carl:** Hello and welcome to the Bitesize English Language Exam Skills podcast.

**Jean:** Whether you're looking for the low down on language or want to write beautiful sentences in your answers, we are here to give you lots of useful tools for your GCSE exams.

**Carl:** My name is Carl Anka. I'm a journalist, author and broadcaster.

**Jean:** And I'm Jean Menzies, an author, ancient historian and presenter.

**Carl:** And in this episode we have some top tips for your creative writing and how to persuade with power.

**Jean:** We'll show you how to write an opening line that hooks the reader

**Carl:** how to plan your ideas quickly, under a time limit

**Jean:** and how to use punctuation and sentence forms for real impact.

**Carl:** You might want to make some notes while you're listening, so it's well worth grabbing a pen and paper. Are you ready? Let's crack on with some creative writing.

**Jean:** Whether you're writing a story or trying to persuade the reader, your opening line has to hook them.

**Carl:** So here are three simple ideas to help you write your first line. The first two are great for creative writing, and the third works really well for persuasive writing, too.

**Jean:** One, decide what you want to convey in that opening. Is it character, atmosphere, action or a point of view? Do you want to throw them straight into the action?

For example, “the door was locked, there was nowhere left to run”.

**Carl:** Or do you want to introduce a character immediately? For example, ‘I’m a secret spy and today is the weirdest day of my life’.

**Jean:** Can't possibly imagine what might be about to happen there.

**Carl:** Two, think about the language you want to use, description, specific vocabulary or you can use things like sensory language. Now, when I use sensory language, I mean touch, taste, smell, sight and sound. These can all make the opening line more vivid and build a picture.

For example, ‘The scream pierced the night air’. The verb ‘pierced’, carries tension and creates a faithful mood.

**Jean:** And three, reveal your purpose early. That's especially useful in persuasive writing. And it might be a statistic, a challenge or a rhetorical question.

For example, ‘98% of teenagers say they don't get enough sleep’. A statistic like that instantly focuses your argument.

**Carl:** Those three choices, what you specifically want to reveal in your opening language and purpose help you hook the reader straight away.

**Jean:** And actors know this too because a first line can shape how they approach the whole performance.

**Carl:** For this series, we've teamed up with the National Theatre. Actors spend a lot of time exploring scripts, so they are experts in thinking about language and structure, and in this case, we're talking about opening lines.

**Nina:** Hi, my name's Nina Cassells. I am an actor. I'm currently working at the National Theatre. I've also worked at the Globe and the Bridge Theatre.

One of my favourite lines from a book is *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood. It starts with 'Only dead people are allowed to have statues, but I have been given one while still alive, already I am petrified'.

I think that is such a brilliant opening line because it sets the tone for the whole book, whilst also giving the reader so many questions. Why has she been given this statue? Why is she living in a world where people need to die to be honoured? And it immediately makes you want to read more and gather more details about this person.

**Jean:** Thank you so much Nina Cassells.

**Carl:** You can search 'How to Improve Your Creative Writing Bitesize' to watch a short video on more creative writing techniques.

**Jean:** In this next part we're looking at how you can structure your creative writing under a time limit. When you're in an exam, it is important to set aside a few minutes to plan because you can't dive straight in without thinking.

**Carl:** Spending a few minutes planning your structure can give you something to refer to during your writing and help it flow. You can find more about how to plan a strong essay answer on the Bitesize English Literature Exam Skills podcast on BBC Sounds.

Now for creative writing, it can really help to plan a simple story arc before you begin.

**Jean:** You may have also heard this described as a story mountain. It's the same idea. Your story rises, peaks and then falls.

**Carl:** So, at the start of the arc, your opening, you establish the character and the setting.

**Jean:** Then you introduce a problem or obstacle. That's what drives your story forward and increases tension.

**Carl:** Next comes the climax. That's the moment where the problem reaches its most dramatic point.

**Jean:** After the climax, there has to be some kind of change. Maybe your main character realises something or a relationship shifts,

**Carl:** and then we finally come to the resolution, the ending that shows the outcome of the change.

**Jean:** If you keep that simple story arc in your head - opening, problem, climax, change, resolution - it can really help you structure your creative writing clearly in the time pressure of the exam.

**Carl:** And one last tip, keep your story simple. Too many characters or too much plot can make it very tricky to manage within the time that you've got in your exam.

**Jean:** A persuasive text can take the form of an article, letter, review or speech. Whichever it is, it should include an introduction, main section and conclusion or summary. The introduction is where you set out your argument.

**Carl:** Then the main body of what you write is a series of paragraphs where you develop your arguments

**Jean:** Then your summary or conclusion is your last chance to convince the reader and leave them with something memorable.

**Carl:** Again, remember this top tip, if you spend a few minutes preparing your structure, the actual writing part will be much easier.

**Jean:** All we need to do now is think about how you can make your writing really shine, which brings us on to sentence structure.

Okay. So, Carl, we discussed how to write an opening line that hooks the reader.

**Carl:** Yes, we have.

**Jean:** We've discussed how to plan your ideas quickly under a time limit.

**Carl:** Yep.

**Jean:** So now we're going to look at how you can use sentence structure, bold word choices and effective punctuation to create effects for your reader.

**Carl:** Excellent. Let's start with varying your sentence structure. Using a mix of short and longer sentences creates rhythm and keeps your writing engaging.

**Jean:** Exactly. Short sentences can increase tension or drama and one-word sentences add impact.

**Carl:** Whilst longer complex sentences can build atmosphere or reveal emotion.

Try combining different sentence types to control the pace and flow of your story.

**Jean:** And also look at the structure of your writing as a whole. You can use punctuation, not just for accuracy, but for effect. Semicolons can link two ideas that are closely connected. Colons can introduce related material, like an explanation or a reveal.

**Carl:** And yes, you can use exclamation marks to show strong emotion like excitement or surprise, but don't overuse. Save exclamation marks for moments that really need impact.

**Jean:** Thanks, Carl.

Next, in your creative writing toolkit is the language you use. The words you use and how you use them, create an atmosphere.

For example, if you're writing about something being scary, you could use 'terrifying', 'creepy' or 'unnerving'.

Instead of 'worried', try 'anxious', 'uneasy' or 'on edge', and rather than 'loud', you might say 'deafening', 'thunderous' or 'ear splitting'.

**Carl:** I love those examples, Jean. You could also bring your writing to life with figurative language. Things like similes, metaphors and personification.

**Jean:** A simile compares one thing to another to sharpen the image. For example, 'the silence hung like a thick fog'.

**Carl:** A metaphor describes something as if it is something else to create a strong impression. For example, 'Her confidence was a wildfire spreading fast'.

**Jean:** And personification gives human qualities to something non-human. For example, 'The wind hammered the windows demanding to be let in'.

**Carl:** That's a great example, Jean,

**Jean:** Right! It's time for a challenge, and feel free to make notes and join in. Let's take a couple of sentences on a simple subject and make them as captivating as possible for a reader. Try this one. Carl, tell us about a stormy night while varying your sentence structure.

**Carl:** Okay, I'm going to give this my best shot.

'As the rain lashed the streets outside and the wind rattled the roof tiles. She made her way cautiously up the dimly lit staircase. Thunder clapped over the house. Darkness'.

**Jean:** Oh, now I want to know what happens next. Those changes in sentence structure and rhythm really build attention. You've got long descriptive sentences that set the scene and create suspense.

And then that short final sentence, 'Darkness', delivers a sudden shock for the reader and me.

It's a great example of how varying your sentence length can create drama and keep the audience on edge. As we already know, the character is on a dimly lit staircase and now suddenly it's totally dark as well.

**Carl:** And here's a challenge for you, Jean. Give me a strong opening to a magazine article about everyday things that we can do to help the environment.

**Jean:** Okay, let me see what I can do. 'Did you shower today? Did you recycle your rubbish? Small decisions can make a big difference'.

**Carl:** Ooh, that's powerful stuff. Using rhetorical questions here.

That's a persuasive technique that can make the reader stop and think about their actions. Then the short statement, 'small decisions can make a big difference', gives a clear, memorable message that motivates the reader to take responsibility. The fact that you said small things can have a big outcome is very clever.

**Jean:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Carl:** Right then, listener, I hope you have some tools now to help your creative writing and persuasive prose in your GCSE. Thank you for listening to the Bitesize English Language Exam Skills podcast.

**Jean:** Remember, you can find the rest of the series right now on BBC Sounds.