

How to answer an evaluation question

"In your English language exams, you'll be asked to evaluate a text. This means thinking critically about a text, questioning its themes, ideas, and what the writer is trying to convey. You also need to give an informed opinion about how well a writer has achieved their purpose that uses evidence from the text in the form of quotes.

This evidence must support the opinions and arguments you are making in your answer. Let's look at a sample text and question.

"It was like a ragged storm cloud sweeping out of the stars now and then one returned for a minute and was lost again. I was now almost frantic with the horror of becoming darkness and my self possession deserted me."

The question is, in this text, the writer describes how a character feels in a dark room where the candlelight is flickering. How well does the writer create an atmosphere to engage the reader?

The first thing you need to do is to read the text carefully and to pull out quotes that are relevant to the question. You should always keep the writer in mind. It is their skill and technique you are evaluating. In your introduction, you should give your overall view on the text and how well you think the writer has achieved their purpose.

For example, you may write, "the writer has successfully created a compelling and fearful atmosphere that expertly engages the reader." Note the use of evaluative words successfully and expertly. These start your answer with a clear and evaluative opinion about a text. You then need to expand on this opinion by using evidence that shows why you think this.

The writer effectively creates a sense of impending doom and terror through the use of vivid imagery and sensory details. The comparison of the darkness to a ragged storm cloud skillfully sets a foreboding and terrifying tone by using a simile.

The three key elements here are evaluative words effectively and skillfully that give an opinion. The reference to the techniques the writer has used, vivid imagery, sensory details, comparison, simile, and the quote from the text "ragged storm cloud" that is evidence for this opinion. You could go on to say 'The writer successfully engages the reader by creating a powerful sense of empathy and suspense through word choices. The narrator's emotional turmoil is obvious as evidenced by their "frantic" state and "horror of the coming darkness".'

When evaluating, you always need to keep the writer and the tools and techniques they've used in mind. Use evaluative words in your response and evidence selected from the text."