



## **GCSE Bitesize revision audio scripts**

**English: Writing to inform, explain or describe**

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## **Writing to inform, explain or describe: Typical questions and the general approach**

This audio bite is about typical questions and the general approach.

**ALIX:** Writing to inform, explain or describe tends to mean you are writing about facts and your experiences. For instance, you might have to write about a place you know, or something that happened to you in the past, or describe an event. Because of this, you need to choose your question very carefully – it must be something you feel happy writing about.

**ELIOT:** And it must be something you know a lot about. The questions usually let you choose exactly what you'll write about. For instance, you could choose your school, or your home, or one of your friends. Whatever it is, you need to plan carefully what to include before you start writing your answer.

**ALIX:** You start by choosing your question, highlighting key words then making a short plan. It's best if you plan paragraph by paragraph, making sure your writing has a direction.

**ELIOT:** Yes, paragraphs are really important – it's one of the things examiners are looking for and let's face it, it's not difficult to start a new paragraph for every new point or so.

**ALIX:** Once you've got the information and the plan, you need to start writing. The first thing to consider is your format – what should the piece of writing look like? For example, is it a letter, or a speech, or an article? An easy way to think about it is to imagine holding it at arm's length. If it's a newspaper article, you should be able to see a headline and clear paragraphs. If it's a formal letter, you should be able to see the ending with something like 'Yours faithfully' and a signature.

**ELIOT:** Once you've got that sorted, you need to make your writing interesting and accurate. Start by changing the length of your sentences – you could have two long sentences, then one short one. You don't need to stick to a pattern, but you do need to vary your sentences. You should also read what you've written every few minutes to make sure it makes sense.

**ALIX:** Another way to add interest is to use words like 'because, but, since, so, either', or 'consequently'. These will link your thoughts together and make your ideas come alive. These are also words that examiners are on the look out for.

**ELIOT:** Then think of the detail you need to give. Imagine you have to write about the place you are in now – what does it look like? Is there anything interesting? This is what Alix came up with.

ALIX: In the corner, on an old set of drawers, is a little white and green frog, lying on its back and smiling at me. The stuffing's coming out at the side and it's missing an eye. It's only a cheap toy but Jamie won it at the fair last year and whenever I look at it I think of him. My frog prince.

ELIOT: Alix's paragraph gave lots of detail and brought the place alive. She obviously knows it well, can imagine it in her mind and can write it out so others can imagine it. And that's what these questions ask you to do – to write about your experiences.

So read the questions very carefully and choose something you know well. Once you've highlighted the key words, make a plan using all your ideas and divide it into paragraphs. Keep looking at your plan as you write your answer.

Make your writing interesting by checking it, changing the length of the sentences, using words like 'because' and giving lots of detail.

## **Writing to inform, explain or describe: Writing to inform**

This audio bite is about writing to inform.

ELIOT: When you are writing to inform, there are all sorts of possible subjects. But you won't be asked to write about something you don't know or understand. For instance, you might have to give information about a place, such as where you live or your school.

ALIX: Or you may have to write information about a person, such as your best friend, your favourite teacher or a famous person.

ELIOT: So pick something that you really are interested in and know something about. It's no good picking the latest pop star if you only heard about them last week – there are bound to be far easier people to write about, like this:

ALIX: Natasha – she's my best friend. She's about my size. We hang around together. We like the same music. We're planning on going on holiday together in the summer.

ELIOT: Those ideas might not seem like a lot, but they're fine to get going. Alix just needs to add some detail:

ALIX: Natasha's my best friend. She's a bit smaller than me but we wear the same size clothes and we sometimes swap. In fact the first time I really noticed her was at a school disco, and we both had the same top on, from Topshop.

ELIOT: That sounds better. She uses words which contrast, like 'but' and 'both'. It's kept interesting and gives us lots of information. After you've thought of this sort of detail, you can try to link the paragraphs together – it's much better than having ideas in a random order. It sounds difficult, but it isn't.

ALIX: For instance, your information could be about changes through time. So if it was about someone in your family, you'd write about things as they grew up. Or if it was about the environment, you could write about how it seems to get worse over time, using ideas like this:

ELIOT: Now more people have cars, so there's more traffic and pollution. We use more energy, with lots of things plugged in around our homes. Children also seem to have lots more things, like video games.

ALIX: It would be easy to expand these ideas into separate paragraphs, and into a good answer. You could link your ideas in other ways, such as dealing with the most important information first. Or even write about something as if you were walking around it.

ELIOT: So if you had to write some information about your school, imagine going from room to room, or from building to building. This will help you remember the different subjects and teachers.

ALIX: Or imagine walking through the town centre – you'll get lots of ideas about what information you could write about.

ELIOT: So when you are writing information, it's really important to pick your question carefully. If you don't really know much about something, you won't be able to tell your readers much either. So think hard, write down your ideas and choose the one you know the most about.

Then link sentences together. You can use easy words, like 'so, and', or 'because' as well as difficult ones, like 'however, despite' and 'in conclusion'.

You need to link your ideas and paragraphs as well. For example, you could look at changes over time, or at contrasts, or write about things in the order a visitor would see them. Remember – when you are writing to inform, you should always be telling the reader about something, or someone.

## Writing to inform, explain or describe: Writing to explain

This audio bite is about writing to explain.

ALIX: When you write to explain, you should be doing two basic things. You should be giving information about the subject, and you should be answering the questions why, or how, or what. It's this second bit that seems odd – it might be easy to say what your favourite TV programme is, but not so easy to say why it's your favourite.

ELIOT: But that's what the exam asks you to do – you must explain something. So you need to plan carefully and get as much detail as possible. For example, if you really like EastEnders, make a list of reasons, like this:

ALIX: Most of my friends like it, so we talk about it at school. I fancy one of the lads in it, and sometimes the stories are things that happen to friends of mine. It also makes me think about what I'd do if I was in that situation.

ELIOT: That's not a bad start. There are four basic reasons, but so far it's not really an essay. It's just a list. But if you take each reason separately, you could add lots of examples and detail, like this:

ALIX: I fancy one of the lads in it. He's got a lovely smile and loads of girls in my class think he's great. He's a bit cheeky and he seems to get away with murder in the stories. He's often in the paper too, and I had a free poster of him because I collected some tokens. I'd watch anything he was in.

ELIOT: A paragraph like that isn't difficult to write. All Alix was doing was filling in some of the details and talking about things she already knew really well. You need to do the same. You need to develop each paragraph so that you give examples and information to go with your reason. You can even go further and explain a lot more, like this:

ALIX: Sometimes the stories are things that happen to friends of mine. This makes you believe that the people are real and not just actors. Like the time when there was a story about someone stealing some money from their mum. Jodie in my class did this, and she got found out, just like in the programme. In a way, it taught me never to do anything like that, and that's why it's such a good programme.

- ELIOT: The question you have might look a bit more difficult than this – it could be about a difficult choice you made, or choosing a holiday for a friend, then explaining your choice. Or even choosing a number of birthday presents for your family, and then giving your reasons.
- ALIX: Whatever it is, the basic idea is always the same - you plan your information into paragraphs, then add interesting detail to the reasons. So for a present for your younger sister...
- ELIOT: I'd get Katie, my sister, a camera phone because she's always calling her friends, she loves taking photos, she's always hogging our phone at home, and it'd make her feel safer when she's out.
- ALIX: Again there are four main reasons here, and if you added examples, each could become a full paragraph. So when you're writing to explain, plan as much as possible. Give information. Give reasons. Keep thinking about why, how and what.
- And add detail – it's no good just having a short list. So put each idea in its own paragraph. Then add examples and as much detail as you can. It's fine to use stories about your friends or family too – this isn't just filling up the page. It makes your explanation clearer. It also makes your writing more interesting and more personal.

### **Writing to inform, explain or describe: Writing to describe**

This is audio bite is about writing to describe.

- ALIX: Writing to describe sounds easy – the questions are straightforward, like describe someone you know well, or describe a favourite room. But there is a knack to getting it right. Firstly, you need to give lots of details. Secondly, you need to make it interesting for others to read.
- ELIOT: It's a bit like drawing a picture, the details you provide are like the different shapes and colours. And the more details you write about, the clearer the picture is.
- ALIX: One way to do it is to think of our five senses. What you can see, what you can touch, what you can smell, what you can taste and what you can hear. You won't want to use all of these all of the time, but the senses can be very useful. For example:
- ELIOT: The door creaked open and I immediately smelt the musty dampness. It was horrible. I reached for the light switch but my hand found a thick cobweb which stuck to my fingers.

ALIX: It doesn't have to be scary, but it should add to the detail and there's no reason why you can't use your senses to describe all sorts of things. For example, what could you hear in a supermarket? What things would you see on the school bus? What could you smell at the seaside?

ELIOT: A second way to add detail is to imagine you are a camera. What you are writing about is a series of photos you have taken. So imagine you are describing a party you went to, the first 'photo' is taken before you go in, like this:

ALIX: I could see lights shining brightly from Shaun's house and I could hear the muffled music from the end of the road.

ELIOT: And another 'photo' is taken when you are watching some girls dancing, like this:

ALIX: There were three girls, about 16 years old, wearing flared jeans and hippy tops. The tallest, with long blonde hair and a silly pair of pink sunglasses, was trying to do the dance from an Austin Powers film.

ELIOT: Alix has given lots of detail here. But she's also made it more interesting by carefully selecting what she describes. For example, it would be boring to know exactly what the dance was, step by step, or every single thing the girls were wearing. But what Alix has described gives us a clear image of them.

The other thing she's done is just describe what she saw. Many people make the mistake of telling a story – they want to write about what they did at the party. If you do this you are not answering the question and you won't spend much time actually describing the scene.

ALIX: So when you are writing to describe, remember to stick to the question you've chosen. And remember that it is the detail that counts. You need to paint a picture with this detail, so give as much information as you can.

Use your senses as much as you can. The easiest ones are what you see and hear, but don't forget what you touch, taste and smell.

Try to take snapshots of the scene in your mind. You could do one 'photo' for each paragraph and so you cover a number of different things.

Don't try to describe the obvious things in great detail. Instead, look for any interesting and unusual detail - there is always

something you can find - and make absolutely sure you describe that.