

Mastering English

Hey everyone! We're so excited to share with you our first (of many) VCE mastery blogs! These'll give you insights into how all the top scorers in the state tackle the niches of SACs and Exams throughout the year. Worrying about cementing your top-4 with English? Don't Worry, this one is just for you!



Mastering Text Response

Text response is often (but not always) the first exposure you have to essay writing in your high school journey - so one expects that over the years everyone builds a solid foundation on how to read, interpret, and analyse texts. To do well in your SACs and express your examiners, though, we need to think above and beyond and realise that knowledge alone isn't always the key.

Prompt exposure!

I'm not even going to talk about reading the book, that's a no brainer. But once you've reached the point where you feel comfortable in talking, verbally at least, about your text's issues and themes, make sure to search the internet and compile as many essay topics and prompts as possible. Try organising them by themes - what you'll find is that many of them under one theme have essentially the same premise.

After compiling them in a document somewhere, try to come up with three arguments for each one - first untimed, then as you get the hang of it - under timed conditions (I tried doing it under 7 mins).

Adapting!

Now, at first I recommend writing fresh essay responses to each prompt you see leading up to your text response SAC - so as to flesh out ideas and perfect your improvisation skills. Sometimes, depending on your school's SAC time/length it may even be beneficial to write a 'fresh' response on the day as well (although I personally recommend always have chunks of theme-based analysis you can rely on).



Mastering Creative

So, I didn't have this part in my exam, for better or worse, but over the past year or so I've done my fair share of research on creative writing. In school, we did have a creative SAC in the more traditional format of creative-writing-inspired-by-book in the form of short story, speech, poem etc, etc... However there is some consolidation we need to do in both the 'new' and 'old stuff' that VCAA is requiring students to present in the exam.

The old stuff

Creative writing is often difficult for students to get started with, because its hard to come up with things from scratch. Luckily, VCAA only wants us to do that to some extent. In your SACs for example, you may be required to write a traditional creative piece (short story, poem, play, etc) based on a 'mentor' - or guide - text. You use the text and its key ideas and themes to essentially help guide your writing. When writing itself though, be sure to utilise the 5 key senses (see, hear, touch, smell, taste...duh) when describing settings. Try doing this every time you introduce a physical space - even if it seems arduous - trust me it really invokes the reader's imagination

The sand is the most gentle hue of **gold (see)**, the sweetest **warmth (touch/feel)** between my tiny toes heating my skin under the scorching sun. I love this beach. I love lying down on my towel after a cool dive in the water while the sweet rush of the seashells **whisper against the shore (hear)** waiting to become the treasure one takes home. My favourite though, of everything that is here upon the softly rolling dunes, is the **flora (smell) of those salty waves**, like a breath of fresh air and a taste of true life. A life far away from tall buildings and lavish properties, one that embraces the true beauty of nature that though **tastes salty (taste)** is indeed the sweetest glimpse of paradise.

An example of setting description using the 5 senses.

The new stuff

Now in order for VCAA to be able to 'assess' creative writing - they still have to find some way to funnel 30 thousand responses into markable groups for the exam. I introduce the frameworks: writing about personal journeys, writing about protests, writing about play, and writing about country. For the exam, these act kind of like your 'mentor' texts - in the sense they guide your writing. Much like the GAT, for this section you're presented with 3 stimuli and a title to work with in your response (one quote, one image, and one poem). I recommend using the ideas in at least 2 of the stimuli (VCAA says at least 1) - to broaden your writing scope.

The question now becomes, **How do you structure your writing** for this section?
I would advise something as follows:

200-300 words for talking about the ideas posed by the stimuli

400 words for talking about personal (or made up? they wouldn't know XD) experiences related to the framework



happy
brain
education

Mastering Argument Analysis

To be honest with you, while it's often said that Section C - argument analysis - is the 'hardest' section to master. But to me there are a few reasons that it can be made really, really easy and dare I say even, fun?

It was by far my favourite section to work on, and the improvement was proportional to the effort I put in. The most 'difficult' part of this whole section is being able to pick on the phrases/strategies/techniques that 90 percent of other students can't - and that comes with practice. Reading opinion pieces on real newspapers is a fantastic way to expose yourself to a variety of real world issues that VCAA might get inspired by - but also introduces you to real audiences and real points of view and conflict. Therefore, you're more poised to be able to imagine or perceive how authors might sway readers of the opposing opinion etc.

On top of constant exposure and practice, there are 3 key ideas that built the foundation of my perfect score in this section:

1 - TONE

You must be able to decipher not only the base tone of the piece (if there is one), but also the way that tone changes throughout it - these are called tonal shifts. Think about it, when someone is talking to you in real life, a lecturer is giving a speech, a politician is talking on TV - they aren't using the same tone throughout. You'd turn off the TV, or fall asleep. Tonal shifts are how speakers and writers convey a sense of ease, or a sense of urgency and simply keep you engaged. I started off very basic with my tonal analysis - using terms like "frustrated" or "elated" or even "disappointed" tone. Then, with the help of Google, I found the perfect synonyms and reused them whenever I could to imprint into my memory.

eventually, I became so fascinated by individuals' change of tone that in my exam, instead of structuring my piece around arguments - I structured it around tonal shifts!

2 - IMAGE ANALYSIS

I am guilty of forgetting to analyse the image(s). In past SACs, it just became an after thought because I was so excited at this new phrase that caught my eye. This is INEXCUSABLE in the exam (and in your SACs XD). Images are actually quite easily to analyse and interpret symbolically because VCAA basically reuses common tropes within the image (cloudy skies for negative connotations, sunshine for happy etc)

3 - AUDIENCE

Last but not least, we need to have a focus on audience. Who are they? Why are they the one's the writer/speaker chooses to address. How do they address this audience? and most importantly - what does the writer INTEND to make the audience feel/react/do?



Tips and Tricks - Oral Presentation

When I started preparing for my oral presentation - I broke it down into X key parts:

- **Structure**
- **Content**
- **Delivery**

Before starting:

Try to choose a topic that interests you and is relevant to students and teachers - make sure the teacher approves of the topic.

Choose a relevant persona - you are more than just a student.

Structure

Keep in mind that the start and end matters - first and last impressions

Jump straight in with a dramatic start or an interesting story - follow with the introduction (make the issue important, signpost topics you will speak about)

Body - Arguments simple enough

Conclude with a persuasive call to action

Content

Persuasive techniques - my advice (write whole speech then identify any naturally - then add if need be)

Be sure to reference all sources used

Try to refute opposition in body

Delivery

You need to be engaging if your whole class + teacher are fully engaged - success

Need to memorise and practice delivery

No cue cards - if you memorise everything come across as very confident and authentic

Basics of speaking

- **Tone**
- **Eye contact**
- **Volume**
- **Hands**
- **Pace across the room**
- **Pauses**

practice,practice,practice



The author



Taha | 99.20 | 50 English

