



Key stage 2 English writing training exercise – commentaries

Pupil B – working at greater depth within the expected standard

This collection includes:

- A) a Greek myth
- B) a letter of complaint
- C) a balanced argument
- D) a fable
- E) a blog

All of the statements for ‘working towards the expected standard’, ‘working at the expected standard’, and ‘working at greater depth standard’ are met.

The pupil can write effectively for a range of purposes and audiences, selecting the appropriate form and drawing independently on what they have read as models for their own writing (for example, literary language, characterisation, structure).

Across the collection, writing is effectively tailored for a variety of purposes and audiences, selecting, maintaining and adapting both form and authorial voice throughout. The pupil’s knowledge of language, gained from wide reading of fiction and non-fiction texts, is evident – from the formal balanced argument to the skilful adaptations of a Greek myth and a fable.

‘The Story of Thesos’ draws on the structure and language of a Greek myth to create an original and humorous cautionary tale, cleverly melding the knowing wisdom of the authorial voice (*it was always considered wise to... he would be careful not to forget the ‘almost’... well, it could be fatal... it often happens that*) with the smug arrogance of Thesos (*I am just so remarkably skilled... still as smug as ever*) and the weary resignation of his father (*His father sighed. He had heard all of this before*).

Literary language (*Towering statues looked over all that lived there... fat-fingered fumbler*), patterning (*quick-tempered with his father, rude to his servants and unfriendly to his fellow citizens... Ares had been confident, proud, careless*) and grammatical choices (*In stepped a shrivelled-up hag... Gone was the tattered travelling cloak... In their place stood a tall, muscular man*) contribute to the overall success of the piece.

Well placed clues, including the early reference to the statue of Ares “*wielding his fatal blade*”, the unannounced arrival of the “*shrivelled-up hag*”, and Ares’ realisation of his “*own*”

empty hand’, engage the reader, requiring the implied meaning to be inferred and foreshadowing the events that follow. The ending is skilfully handled, from the anticipation (*Something was wrong... The crowd fled*) to the startling outcome. Whilst it is inevitable that Thesos will be punished for his arrogance, his apt transformation into a sword, withheld until the final sentence, still has the power to shock.

Although ‘Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets’ provides the stimulus for the letter, the writer draws not only on their reading of this novel, but also on their reading of formal letters to lodge an official complaint about Harry. By choosing to write in role as the Basilisk, the writer is able to make oblique references (*Hissssss translation... dim-witted half-giant, Reubeus Hagrid... a non-explanatory grudge against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*) that are likely to appeal to those familiar with the novel. These cleverly reveal the overbearing and duplicitous nature of the giant snake through a combination of flattery (*Being the great and wise man you are*) and assertion (*It is an atrocious thing to harbour grudges... you will agree that this is a terrible act*) in a cynical attempt to have Harry expelled from Hogwarts. Furthermore, the use of ‘it’ as the subject of a clause (*it is my duty to inform you... It is an atrocious thing to harbour grudges*) has the effect of slightly distancing the writer from the views expressed, making the Basilisk’s assertions seem more plausible than they actually are.

In the balanced argument, the writer deals with a potentially emotive topic in an authoritative and objective manner. By providing detailed information about the impact of deforestation, the writer leaves the reader in no doubt about the seriousness of the issue. Despite acknowledging the counter argument (*an opportunity to earn money and make a living... they have no choice*) and the tentativeness of some of the facts (*It is estimated that... perhaps the most detrimental of them being... may lose... could crush*), the writer deftly secures their case (*However, most people believe that [...] is the right thing to do*).

The fable draws on the pupil’s reading of Kipling’s ‘Just So’ stories to create a new tale about the koala’s shout. Language choices evoke a convincing narrative voice (*In the beginning... indeed, he had developed... oh Best Beloved*), whilst literary language (*the unfortunate rocks... tail swishing like a turbine*) and repetitive patterning (*On Tuesday... and shouted... And the koala said*) contribute to the authentic style of the piece. The apparent simplicity of the tale belies its sophistication – the modal ‘would’, used extensively at the start of the piece (*would sit... would look up... would remain silent*), is reinforced by the past progressive (*was sitting... was sleeping*) and simple present (*I am... you are*) to suggest the koala’s habitual behaviour, whilst the perfect form (*had developed... has been... has [...] not made up for*) suggests the changed state of affairs at the end.

The blog, based on the writer’s interpretation of Neverland, skilfully relocates the narrative to the world of online computer games, with Peter and the lost children engaged in a deadly fight against a world populated by robots. The form of the blog provides the vehicle for the narrator to tell his story, artfully interweaving the world of online computer gaming and screen chat with a hi-tech version of Neverland to create a highly original narrative.

The narrator addresses the blog directly, almost as an old friend, drawing on shared experiences (*Hello blog... I haven’t seen you in a while... You know, where you start off*

with), and seeming to blog as the events unfold around him, creating pace and immediacy (*I would tell you, but it seems as if we're evacuating... I have to go now*). The piece is neatly structured, with the writer's opening explanation for having neglected his blog, and the final reference to "that Anonymous guy" who set in motion the whole train of events.

Clause structures are varied, combining sentence fragments (*All of the game data erased*) with single and multi-clause sentences, sometimes introduced by a co-ordinating conjunction to suggest the narrator's train of thought (*And I was only about 2,000 XP away from getting to level 78!*). Combined with the subtle humour ("*OT OS AAT!*" *I yelled [translation: WHAT WAS THAT!]*)... *It's strange, fighting a robot. They're a lot smarter than you think... I'm really starting to hate that Anonymous guy*), the piece is indicative of a writer sufficiently assured to draw on and adapt their chosen genre to engage the reader.

The pupil can distinguish between the language of speech and writing and choose the appropriate register.

Throughout the collection, the pupil consistently demonstrates the ability to distinguish between the language of speech and writing, choosing the appropriate register according to context. Features of language more resonant of speech are deliberately deployed to create a level of informality when necessary – for example, to recreate the quirky, conversational style in the blog. However, when writing for more formal contexts, an appropriately formal register is adopted, avoiding the language that might otherwise be used in speech.

The writer consciously adopts a highly informal register in the blog, in keeping with its context. Language resonant of speech recreates the narrator's casual, chatty style when addressing his blog as a familiar old friend (*Okay, let me explain. You know all those books and movies about... You know, where you start off with*). Vague language (*dream of this stuff... this sort of landing pad... evacuating or something*) and the humorous replication of his distorted speech (*EY! OT OO OO IN' OOR OOH!*) add to the authenticity of the piece, whilst abbreviated forms and colloquial language (*gotta... newbies... 'round here... 'cos... nick... 'em... Nah, it's fine*) encapsulate the distinctive voice of the "new Peter Pan".

In contrast, the impersonal and objective tone adopted in the balanced argument is indicative of the highly formal register required (*It is estimated that... experts predict that... perhaps the most detrimental of them being... After much consideration*). Vocabulary choices are precise (*deforestation... demolished... economically developed... hazard... detrimental*), as befitting the audience, form and purpose of the writing as well as its more serious subject matter.

The Greek myth and the fable both adopt a semi-formal register, contributing to the somewhat antiquated feel of the writing (*it was always considered wise... The crowd was silenced as thunder clapped overhead... The koala was errant and idle... Why must you have created such an idle burden and placed it within our midst?*). The voices of the characters, conveyed through dialogue, are similarly formal (*Thesos, my boy... You have challenged me. Soon you may regret it... why must you remain silent?*), helping to evoke the mythical setting of the stories.

An appropriately formal register is adopted in the letter of complaint about Harry Potter, written from the perspective of the Basilisk (*a matter of utmost importance... my duty to inform you... which is strictly forbidden... Undoubtedly this is unacceptable behaviour*). Occasional lapses into a slightly less formal register (*the dim-witted half-giant... the great oaf... an arrogant, lying rule-breaker*) are entirely appropriate as the ingratiating Basilisk's mask slips and his true nature is revealed.

The pupil can exercise an assured and conscious control over levels of formality, particularly through manipulating grammar and vocabulary to achieve this.

Throughout the collection, levels of formality are consciously controlled according to context, audience and purpose. Grammatical structures and vocabulary are manipulated to convey differing levels of formality – from the highly formal argument on deforestation to the conversational style of the blog and the somewhat archaic formality of the myth and the fable.

In 'The Story of Thesos', the writer makes assured choices of both grammar and vocabulary. The impersonal 'it' construction, incorporating the passive voice (*it was always considered wise*), and the deliberate choice of modal verbs (*you may regret it... Nobody could say... you shall learn why*), sometimes in conjunction with the personal pronoun 'one' (*One might go as far as... Should one grow arrogant enough to*), combine with apt vocabulary choices (*undid him... deadly foe... old crone... Take heed... ask his pardon... befall*) to successfully capture the semi-formal style of a Greek myth.

A semi-formal style is similarly adopted in the fable through the avoidance of contracted verb forms (*He would sit... I am silent... he had developed*) and the deliberate repetition of modal verbs (*the koala would answer... why must you...?*). The writer's conscious and assured use of syntax combines with judicious choices of vocabulary (*errant and idle... oh Best Beloved... idle burden... within our midst... heard their pleas*), including the use of 'for' as a conjunction (*for this was not their working time*), to successfully recreate the solemn and slightly antiquated style of the original Kipling stories.

The letter to Professor Dumbledore deploys a level of formality befitting the character of the deceitful Basilisk in an attempt to dupe Dumbledore into expelling Harry from Hogwarts. The somewhat pompous tone is achieved through assured vocabulary choices (*a matter of utmost importance... my duty to inform you... restricted section... strictly forbidden... Undoubtedly... unacceptable behaviour*) and manipulation of grammar, including agentless passives (*he has been caught many times... he has been seen in... should be expelled from*) and the considered use of modal verbs (*you will expel... this may lead... you will agree... should be expelled*).

The balanced argument adopts and maintains a highly formal style appropriate to its audience, purpose and subject matter. An authoritative tone is achieved through precise and often subject-specific vocabulary (*deforestation... rainforest... economically developed... citizens... hazard... detrimental... arboreal... ground-dwelling*), whilst more

informal choices (*a patch of rainforest... a chunk of rainforest*) invite the reader to draw familiar analogies (*60 full-sized football pitches... the size of Switzerland*).

Agentless passives (*is being demolished... it has been deemed that... should be reduced*), including an impersonal 'it' construction (*It is estimated that*), support the writer's seemingly objective stance by attributing no blame. Expanded noun phrases (*One of the most debated and problematic issues of this century, deforestation... the less economically developed countries... a number of disastrous consequences*) and precise use of nouns (*opportunity... consequences... contribution... consideration... destruction*) add weight and gravitas to the writing.

In contrast, the blog deliberately deploys informal vocabulary and grammatical constructions to create a highly assured and original narrative. A conversational style is established through the use of second-person direct address (*I haven't seen you in a while... You get the idea*), casual asides (*my face hurt for a while after that... I play Battle Mechs too much*), elliptical sentence fragments (*Or at least not anymore... Again, no sign of Emma or Peter*) and use of co-ordinating conjunctions to start a sentence (*And I was only about... But this is the first time*). Peter's distinctive voice is captured through the use of abbreviated forms (*gotta... 'round here... give 'em*) and colloquial vocabulary (*newbies... nick*) in contrast with Emma's slightly more formal manner (*Which he is not... Stay with me and get ready to shoot at any moment*).

The pupil can use the range of punctuation taught at key stage 2 correctly (for example, semi-colons, dashes, colons, hyphens) and, when necessary, use such punctuation precisely to enhance meaning and avoid ambiguity.

A range of punctuation is used correctly – for example:

- commas to clarify meaning
 - *His wrinkly skin hung in bags, his sunken eyes barely visible underneath a tarnished red hood. [A]*
 - *In addition to this, he has been seen in the restricted section of the library, simply for his own gain. [B]*
 - *As trees take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen, less gas can be taken in and less oxygen is being given. [C]*
 - *On Tuesday, the alligator crawled up to the koala, his tail swishing like a turbine, and shouted... [D]*
 - *Before I had time to register this, he ran in front of me and smacked a blue chip down on the floor, and a circular, translucent blue wall popped up... [E]*
- punctuation to indicate parenthesis
 - *Then, without warning, the crowd erupted in to cheers. [A]*
 - *Being the great and wise man you are, after reading these numerous reasons, you will expel Harry Potter... [B]*
 - *Animals that are arboreal (live in trees)... [C]*

- *It slowly floated towards the koala, who was sleeping on his treetop perch, and landed on...* [D]
- *“We managed to nick some of these [...] over there” – he pointed to a building next to the big signal tower thing – “and Luke here worked [...] some upgrades.”* [E]
- *... and a plasma gun shot out (I play Battle Mechs too much).* [E]
- *The light, however, should pass straight through you...* [E]

- colons, semi-colons and dashes to mark the boundary between independent clauses
 - *“Everyone is jealous of me but I understand why; I am just so remarkably skilled.”* [A]
 - *He was the best in the land; his claims to be as good as the war god were true.* [A]
 - *... or that the effects must be contradicted by planting more trees: some people still believe though...* [C]
 - *... and that they do not cut down the trees on purpose – they have no choice.* [C]
 - *Surrounding me was just like that Anonymous guy said: it was nothing like home.* [E]
 - *The wall around us flickered and disappeared [...] shook the ground; before we knew it, we were surrounded by robots.* [E]

- hyphens to avoid ambiguity
 - *... fat-fingered fumbler...* [A]
 - *... dim-witted half-giant...* [B]
 - *... ground-dwelling...* [C]
 - *... midnight-blue sky...* [D]
 - *... an out-of-control craft...* [E]

When necessary, punctuation is used precisely to enhance meaning and avoid ambiguity. For example, commas are used to avoid miscues (*Being the great and wise man you are, after reading these numerous reasons*), to indicate where relative clauses provide additional, non-essential information (*hopped up to the koala, who was sitting in his treetop perch, and cried*) and to mark nouns in apposition (*Ares, God of War... one of your fellow teachers, Professor Quirrel... One of the most debated and problematic issues of this century, deforestation*). Commas are also used precisely to slow the pace of the writing for stylistic effect (*I am silent, and you are all silent to me*).

Commas are used confidently to manage ambitious, multi-clause sentences (*Near where Thesos lived was a colossal amphitheatre, where all the gladiator fights would take place and there, in the centre, stood a glistening, bronze idol of Ares, God of War, wielding his fatal blade... And, as if this was not enough, when the dim-witted half-giant, Reubeus Hagrid, bought a dragon egg, which is strictly forbidden, Harry helped the great oaf to keep the dragon a secret until it was ready to be taken away... It is estimated that, per minute, a patch of rainforest equivalent to that of 60 full-sized football pitches or, in other words, a*

chunk of rainforest the size of Switzerland is being demolished every year, and experts predict that, in 30-50 years time, all rainforests will be gone).

The use of a semi-colon is particularly well chosen in the Greek myth, where it is used effectively to balance 2 linked independent clauses (*He was the best in the land; his claims to be as good as the war god were true*).