

Transactional Writing Devices

GCSE and A Level English Language

How to use this guide

Transactional writing is writing designed to communicate a viewpoint, information or request to a particular audience. It may take the form of a speech, article, letter, leaflet, review or other purposeful text. Use this guide to choose devices that suit the exact form, audience and purpose of the task.

Important: do not force every device into one response. A smaller range of deliberately selected and accurately controlled methods is more effective than a crowded checklist.

The essential planning questions

- What form am I being asked to write?
- Who is my intended audience?
- What is my main purpose?
- What viewpoint or message must remain clear throughout?
- Which tone and level of formality will suit this situation?

1 Audience engagement

Direct address - Speaks directly to the reader or listener using you.

Example: *You have the power to make a difference.*

Vocative - Names or directly addresses the audience.

Example: *Fellow students, this decision affects every one of us.*

Inclusive pronouns - Creates unity between the writer or speaker and the audience.

Example: *We must decide what kind of future we want.*

Exclusive pronouns - Separates one group from another and can establish opposing sides.

Example: *They made the decision, but we must live with it.*

Synthetic personalisation - Creates the impression of an individual relationship with a wider audience.

Example: *Think about the last time you felt ignored.*

Audience specific reference - Uses an experience or concern shared by the intended audience.

Example: *We all know how stressful the examination period can become.*

Imperative - Instructs, encourages or challenges the audience.

Example: *Consider the consequences before dismissing this proposal.*

Call to action - Ends a section or whole text by telling the audience what they should do.

Example: *Write to the council and make your voice heard.*

2 Questions and answers

Rhetorical question - Encourages thought without requiring an immediate answer.

Example: *How much longer can we ignore the problem?*

Hypophora - Asks a question and immediately answers it.

Example: *Can we improve the situation? Yes, but only if we act together.*

Series of rhetorical questions - Builds momentum and places sustained pressure on the audience.

Example: *Who will speak up? Who will take responsibility? Who will act?*

Aporia - Expresses deliberate doubt to invite consideration.

Example: *Perhaps we should ask whether this policy is really as fair as it appears.*

3 Persuasive appeals and evidence

Ethos - Establishes the credibility, knowledge or fairness of the writer or speaker.

Example: *Having volunteered at the centre for two years, I have seen its value first-hand.*

Pathos - Appeals to the audience's emotions.

Example: *No child should feel frightened simply because there is nowhere safe to go.*

Logos - Uses logic and reason to support an argument.

Example: *If the new system costs less and serves more people, it is the sensible choice.*

Personal anecdote - Uses a brief personal experience to make an issue relatable.

Example: *Last winter, I met a family who depended on the food bank every week.*

Case study - Uses a detailed real example to demonstrate a wider point.

Example: *One local school reduced waste significantly after introducing reusable bottles.*

Fact - Provides verifiable information and gives an argument authority.

Example: *The library is currently open for only four hours on Saturdays.*

Statistic - Provides numerical evidence; it must be accurate rather than invented.

Example: *The survey found that 72 per cent of respondents supported the proposal.*

Expert opinion - Refers to a suitable specialist or authority.

Example: *According to child-development specialists, regular reading supports vocabulary growth.*

Testimony or quotation - Introduces another voice as supporting evidence.

Example: *As one resident explained, 'The centre gives people somewhere to belong.'*

Analogy - Explains an unfamiliar idea by comparing it with something familiar.

Example: *A school without a library is like a map with half the roads missing.*

4 Building and balancing an argument

Clear thesis - States the central viewpoint early and directly.

Example: *Public transport should be improved because it is practical, inclusive and environmentally responsible.*

Counterargument - Presents an opposing viewpoint fairly.

Example: *Some residents argue that the plan would be too expensive.*

Concession - Acknowledges that part of the opposing argument has merit.

Example: *Admittedly, the initial cost would be considerable.*

Rebuttal - Challenges an opposing argument using reasoning or evidence.

Example: *However, the long-term savings would outweigh the original expense.*

Procatalepsis - Anticipates an objection before the audience raises it.

Example: *You might argue that young people would not use the facility, but the consultation suggests otherwise.*

Qualification or hedging - Avoids making an unjustified absolute claim.

Example: *The proposal may improve access for many residents.*

High modality - Uses words such as must, will and certainly to express confidence or obligation.

Example: *The council must reconsider this damaging decision.*

Low modality - Uses words such as may, might and could to express possibility or caution.

Example: *The change could create difficulties for some families.*

Contrastive discourse marker - Signals a change or opposition in viewpoint.

Example: *Nevertheless, there is another side to this debate.*

Concessive clause - Builds balance into a sentence, often using although or while.

Example: *Although the scheme is imperfect, it offers a realistic starting point.*

Cause and effect reasoning - Explains why something happens and what it produces.

Example: *Because buses are infrequent, many residents are forced to rely on cars.*

Exemplification - Supports a general claim with a specific example.

Example: *For example, later opening hours would help students who study after school.*

5 Repetition and patterned expression

Repetition - Repeats an important word or phrase for emphasis.

Example: *We need change: change in attitude, change in policy and change in action.*

Anaphora - Repeats the same opening at the beginning of successive clauses.

Example: *We deserve to be heard. We deserve to be consulted. We deserve better.*

Epistrophe - Repeats words at the end of successive clauses.

Example: *This matters to students, it matters to parents and it matters to our community.*

Rule of three or tricolon - Presents three related ideas in a memorable pattern.

Example: *The plan is practical, affordable and necessary.*

Tetracolon - Uses four balanced words, phrases or clauses.

Example: *We can listen, learn, cooperate and improve.*

Syntactic parallelism - Repeats the same grammatical construction.

Example: *To ignore the evidence is careless; to ignore the people is unacceptable.*

Antithesis - Places opposing ideas in a balanced construction.

Example: *This is not a burden; it is an investment.*

Juxtaposition - Places contrasting ideas close together to highlight their difference.

Example: *A small saving for the council could create a serious loss for families.*

Chiasmus - Reverses the structure of a phrase or clause.

Example: *We shape our community, and our community shapes us.*

Climactic structure - Arranges ideas in increasing order of importance.

Example: *The decision will affect one street, an entire neighbourhood and eventually the whole town.*

Anticlimax - Ends a serious sequence with something unexpectedly minor, often for humour.

Example: *The delay caused frustration, financial loss and a very cold cup of tea.*

6 Listing and accumulation

Listing - Presents several examples or ideas together.

Example: *Students need quiet spaces, reliable resources, trained staff and extended opening hours.*

Cumulative listing - Adds detail to create an impression of scale or abundance.

Example: *The centre offers advice, activities, training, friendship and practical support.*

Asyndetic listing - Omits conjunctions to create speed, urgency or force.

Example: *We waited, worried, complained, acted.*

Polysyndetic listing - Repeats conjunctions to suggest abundance or continuation.

Example: *The problem affects children and parents and teachers and volunteers.*

Enumeration - Organises an argument into a numbered or ordered sequence.

Example: *There are three reasons why the proposal should be reconsidered.*

7 Figurative and descriptive language

Metaphor - Describes one thing as though it were another.

Example: *The community centre is the heart of our neighbourhood.*

Extended metaphor - Develops the same comparison across several sentences or sections.

Example: *An idea can be planted, nurtured and allowed to grow into lasting change.*

Simile - Makes an explicit comparison using like or as.

Example: *Ignoring the warning signs is like driving towards a closed road.*

Personification - Gives a non-human thing human qualities.

Example: *The evidence demands our attention.*

Imagery - Uses descriptive language to help the audience picture an idea.

Example: *Imagine silent corridors, locked doors and an empty playground.*

Symbolism - Uses an object, setting or image to represent a wider idea.

Example: *An open door can represent opportunity and inclusion.*

Hyperbole - Uses deliberate exaggeration for emphasis.

Example: *We seem to have waited a lifetime for a decision.*

Understatement - Deliberately makes something appear less serious or important.

Example: *Closing the only youth centre might cause a few difficulties.*

Idiom - Uses a familiar expression whose meaning is not completely literal.

Example: *The council cannot continue to sit on the fence.*

Cliche - Uses a very familiar expression, sometimes deliberately.

Example: *Actions speak louder than words.*

Allusion - Indirectly refers to a familiar person, event, story or idea.

Example: *We should not wait for a superhero to solve a problem within our control.*

8 Lexical choices

Emotive language - Selects words designed to provoke an emotional response.

Example: *It is heartbreaking to see a valuable service abandoned.*

Evaluative language - Communicates a clear judgement of an idea or action.

Example: *This short-sighted proposal would be deeply damaging.*

Loaded language - Uses words carrying strong assumptions or associations.

Example: *Residents have been trapped by an unfair and inflexible system.*

Positive semantic field - Creates favourable associations through related vocabulary.

Example: *Opportunity, progress, confidence, support and success.*

Negative semantic field - Creates unfavourable associations through related vocabulary.

Example: *Isolation, neglect, decline, frustration and loss.*

Technical terminology - Uses accurate subject-specific vocabulary to demonstrate knowledge.

Example: *The policy may intensify social inequality and economic exclusion.*

Jargon - Uses specialised vocabulary associated with a profession or group.

Example: *The proposal requires a full environmental impact assessment.*

Colloquial language - Creates an informal and accessible voice.

Example: *Let's be honest: the current system simply is not working.*

Slang - Can establish solidarity with a particular audience but should be used sparingly.

Example: *Some students thought the new event was amazing; others called it 'mid'.*

Neologism - Uses a recently created word or expression.

Example: *The neologism 'doomscrolling' describes repeatedly reading negative news online.*

Euphemism - Replaces an unpleasant expression with something milder.

Example: *The service is being 'restructured' rather than openly described as being cut.*

Dysphemism - Uses a deliberately harsh or disparaging expression.

Example: *Critics have described the neglected site as a concrete wasteland.*

Comparative - Compares the degree or quality of two things.

Example: *The revised plan would be safer and more accessible.*

Superlative - Expresses the highest or most extreme degree.

Example: *This is one of the most important decisions the council will make.*

9 Sound devices

Alliteration - Repeats initial consonant sounds to make a phrase memorable.

Example: *Safe, supportive spaces strengthen communities.*

Sibilance - Repeats s or sh sounds for a smooth, sinister or emphatic effect.

Example: *Silence spreads through the deserted streets.*

Plosive sounds - Repeats forceful consonants such as b, p, d, t, k or g.

Example: *Poor planning produced predictable problems.*

Assonance - Repeats vowel sounds to create rhythm or emphasis.

Example: *We need to see what this decision really means.*

Rhythm - Uses patterned phrasing and sentence length to make spoken language memorable.

Example: *We heard. We questioned. We acted.*

10 Sentence forms and syntax

Declarative sentence - Makes a statement and can create authority.

Example: *The present system is unsustainable.*

Interrogative sentence - Asks a direct question.

Example: *Why has the community not been consulted?*

Imperative sentence - Commands, requests or encourages action.

Example: *Listen to the people who use this service.*

Exclamative sentence - Expresses strong emotion or judgement.

Example: *What an extraordinary waste of opportunity!*

Minor sentence - Uses an incomplete grammatical structure for emphasis.

Example: *A fair solution? Hardly.*

Simple sentence - Delivers a concise and forceful point.

Example: *The system failed.*

Compound sentence - Joins equally important ideas, usually through coordination.

Example: *The plan appears economical, but its social cost would be high.*

Complex sentence - Combines a main clause with one or more subordinate clauses.

Example: *Although the plan is cheaper, it would reduce access for vulnerable residents.*

Compound-complex sentence - Combines coordination and subordination to develop a sophisticated point.

Example: *The proposal saves money, but although this appears attractive, its wider consequences cannot be ignored.*

Sentence length variation - Controls pace and places emphasis on key points.

Example: *A detailed explanation can build the case. Then stop. Let the message land.*

Fronted conjunction - Creates a conversational transition or forceful contrast.

Example: *But that is not the whole story.*

Fronted adverbial - Guides the reader through time, place or stages of an argument.

Example: *More importantly, the change would protect future generations.*

Parenthetical aside - Adds a conversational comment or qualification.

Example: *The scheme may save money - temporarily, at least.*

11 Tone and voice

Formal register - Creates seriousness and authority.

Example: *This proposal requires careful and immediate reconsideration.*

Informal register - Creates familiarity with an appropriate audience.

Example: *Let's face it: nobody wants the present situation to continue.*

Conversational tone - Makes writing sound natural when spoken or read.

Example: *Now, you may be wondering what this has to do with you.*

Authoritative tone - Presents the viewpoint confidently.

Example: *The evidence clearly demonstrates the need for change.*

Passionate tone - Communicates strong personal commitment.

Example: *We cannot allow another generation to lose this opportunity.*

Humorous tone - Engages the audience and can make criticism more memorable.

Example: *The bus is so unreliable that waiting for it has become a local hobby.*

Irony - Highlights a contradiction between expectation and reality.

Example: *The new 'accessible' service is available only to people who can drive.*

Sarcasm - Uses pointed mockery; it should be controlled carefully.

Example: *Of course, closing the library is a wonderful way to encourage reading.*

12 Punctuation for rhetorical effect

Colon - Introduces an explanation, example, list or decisive point.

Example: *The problem is simple: nobody was consulted.*

Semicolon - Balances or links closely related independent clauses.

Example: *The proposal may save money; it will also reduce access.*

Dash - Introduces interruption, emphasis or qualification.

Example: *The plan could succeed - but only with proper funding.*

Parentheses - Add an aside, clarification or extra detail.

Example: *The facility serves hundreds of residents (many of them elderly).*

Ellipsis - Creates a pause, suspense or an unfinished thought.

Example: *We could continue to wait... or we could act now.*

Exclamation mark - Adds strong emphasis but should be used sparingly.

Example: *Enough is enough!*

13 Structural devices

Strong opening or hook - Immediately captures attention through surprise, imagery, a question or a striking statement.

Example: *By the end of today, another valuable community service may have disappeared.*

Statement of position - Makes the central argument clear near the beginning.

Example: *The centre should remain open because it is essential to the community.*

Signposting - Guides the audience through the stages of the argument.

Example: *First, we need to examine the practical consequences.*

Topic sentence - Introduces the main focus of a paragraph.

Example: *The strongest reason to preserve the service is its impact on young people.*

Cohesive link - Connects one paragraph or stage of reasoning to the next.

Example: *This brings us to the wider issue of equality.*

Circular or cyclical structure - Returns to an image, phrase or question from the opening.

Example: *Opening: 'Imagine the locked door.' Ending: 'Together, we can reopen that door.'*

Motif - Repeats an image or central idea throughout the text.

Example: *A recurring image of doors can represent exclusion and opportunity.*

Climactic ending - Builds towards the strongest or most important conclusion.

Example: *This is not merely about one building. It is about what our community values.*

Memorable final sentence - Leaves the audience with a concise final message.

Example: *The time to listen has passed; the time to act is now.*

Final selection checklist

Before writing, select devices with a clear job to do:

- an opening that immediately establishes interest and purpose
- clear awareness of the intended audience
- a consistent viewpoint supported by reasons and evidence
- a counterargument, concession and rebuttal where the task requires debate
- controlled sentence variety and paragraph sequencing
- vocabulary and tone suited to the form and audience
- a conclusion that reinforces the argument or includes a call to action
- accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar throughout

Remember: form, audience and purpose should control every choice you make.