



## Key stage 2 (KS2) English writing training exercise 3 commentary

### Pupil C – working at the expected standard

The collection includes the following pieces:

- A) a myth
- B) an informative article
- C) a formal letter
- D) a balanced argument
- E) a short horror story

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

The pupil can:

- write effectively for a range of purposes and audiences, selecting language that shows good awareness of the reader (e.g. the use of the first person in a diary, direct address in instructions, and persuasive writing).

Across the collection, the pupil writes effectively for a range of purposes and audiences: a Mayan myth, depicting the quest of a young boy who sets out to save his village; an informative explanation of an ancient Mayan ball game; a formal letter of complaint; a balanced argument debating the legal status of graffiti artists; and a short horror story based on pupils’ shared reading.

Both the myth and the short story adopt a third-person narrative, each depicting a journey in which the outcome differs significantly: the overcoming of adversity by a young village boy, and the consequential fate of a foolhardy schoolboy. The language of storytelling is used effectively in both pieces, showing good awareness of the reader: the myth draws on the phrasing of traditional tales (*Long ago in a small village...And so it was...the yonder world*), whilst the short story reflects the chosen genre, building suspense from the outset (*If only...his story would be different, so different...An uneasy mist...That very night*).

The forceful opening to the explanation of the ball game, Pok-to-Pok, immediately engages the reader, demanding, through the direct address, that they visualise the image presented (*Imagine a ball game so deadly...*). An informative approach combines historical fact with gruesome speculation – an appealing recipe for young readers (*Sources suggest*

*that the losing team were sacrificed*), whilst the direct address in the closing paragraph issues the ultimate challenge (*Would you have the skills...?*).

In both the letter of complaint and the balanced argument, the writer attempts to adopt a more formal stance. The letter, appropriately written in the first person, establishes the writer's dissatisfaction from the start (*I am unfortunately compelled to alert you of your appalling standard of service*), albeit with the slightly inappropriate rhetorical question (*How rude was that?*), before swiftly moving on to recount the numerous causes for complaint. The final demand for recompense, hinting at the possibility of legal action, strengthens the somewhat flippant account of events.

The balanced argument presents a succinct debate around the criminalisation of graffiti artists, providing objective reasons to support both sides (*environmentally friendly...toxic fumes are given off*). The writer's closing stance against the motion helps to secure the argument (*we should not legalise graffiti*).

The pupil can:

- in narratives, describe settings, characters and atmosphere.

Settings, characters and atmosphere are described within the two fictional narratives, as well as in the informative article and the letter of complaint, both of which contain strong elements of narrative in the form of recount.

In the myth and the short story, the writer ably creates convincing settings, characters and atmosphere. The contrasting characteristics of the two protagonists thread through the respective narratives: Votan is explicitly described as 'determined', 'brave' and 'quick thinking', whilst Jake's internal thoughts suggest a stubbornness borne out of misplaced bravado and contempt for his friend's cautiousness (*He's such a wuss...There's no way I'm going the long way home*).

The vulnerability of the Mayan villagers is emphasised through the repercussions of the drought (*crops and water were cutting short; citizens were becoming ill and were complaining of thirst and hunger*), and Votan's desperate plea to Chac (*If it doesn't rain we will...all starve and die*), whilst in the story, the limited description of the escapee signals the impending threat to Jake (*a murderer...extremely dangerous...a hook instead of a hand*).

As the perilous journeys unfold, noun phrases contribute to atmospheric effect (*the undergrowth around long gnarled branches...The smoking moon...a river of shattered glass...A great orb of light / An uneasy mist.....overgrown weeds...a carpet of decaying leaves...the mysterious lane...a ghostly figure*), eventually revealing the features of those most feared (*collars of human eyes hanging from their nerve cords...a skeletal hand / a figure with long wet hair and a piercing in his lip...A large steel hook*).

The detailed description of the Mayan ball game enables the reader to visualise the scene (*the city will all watch...an I shaped court...totally open...constructed of concrete and stone...often connected to a temple*), the equipment required (*3kg ball...protective gear...a small hoop 20ft high on a sloped wall*), and the intensity and ferocity of the contest (*so deadly...go on for several days...can break your bones...treacherous sport*), whereas the tense atmosphere on court can be inferred from the consequences of being on the losing team (*a matter of life and death...were sacrificed*).

Indirect characterisation threads through the letter of complaint: staff are painted as discourteous and indifferent (*rude...no help from the staff*), and the manager as incompetent (*your appalling standard of service...the movie we had been expecting...!*

would train your staff with more care), whilst the firmly worded summary intimates the writer's tenacity (*If you do not reimburse...I shall be seeking legal advice*).

The pupil can:

- integrate dialogue in narratives to convey character and advance the action.

Dialogue is interwoven within the two stories, capturing the personalities of their characters and advancing the action.

Kukulchan's response to Votan's plea contextualises the villagers' plight and acts as a turning point in the story (*The rain god has been captured... You will need to go down to the under world and bargain with them to set him free*), whilst Votan's further plea not only hints at his humility (*I need help*), but prompts a solution to his predicament, again moving the action forward (*a pair of winged sandals*). Colloquial language in speech characterises the unsavoury inhabitants of the Underworld (*What are you doin' ere? ...You're gunna ave to complete the 'ouses of spikes...*); however, despite their obvious loathing of the intruder (*Your a filthy mortal...*), the Lords of Death disclose an uncharacteristic integrity (*You will see if we kept our side of the bargain*), signalling a positive outcome to the tale.

The limited dialogue in the short horror story juxtaposes Ben's anxiety (*Let's go quick...faster the better*) with his friend's self-assured demeanour (*He won't get us...We could out-run him anyway*): the voicing of Jake's thoughts (*There's no way I'm going the long way home*) as he sets out alone, acts to intensify speculation that events will not end well.

The pupil can:

- select vocabulary and grammatical structures that reflect what the writing requires, doing this mostly appropriately (e.g. using contracted forms in dialogues in narrative; using passive verbs to affect how information is presented; using modal verbs to suggest degrees of possibility).

Across the collection, choices of vocabulary and grammatical structures are mostly appropriate to what the writing requires.

Clause structure in the myth is varied, supporting reader engagement. The past progressive (including the perfect form) conveys the ongoing state of affairs (*had been going on for weeks...crops and water were cutting short; citizens were becoming ill and were complaining*); passive constructions foreground the victim (*The rain god has been captured*) and method of torture (*These spikes were made...*); and modal verbs indicate obligation (*you will need to go*), possibility (*it might be useful*), and certainty (*The meer sight of one would send the bravest warrior fleeing... You will see*). Fronted clauses emphasise the intent of the young protagonist (*Determined to save his village, Brave Votan decided...Stepping up Votan declared...*) and create a sense of immediacy (*As he parted them, a coat of black soot flooded out...Lighting his cloth he fended himself*), though at times, the use of -ing verbs is unduly repetitive (*Stepping down...Rolling downwards... Looking up...Having completed...*).

There is some attempt at literary language for effect, (*a drought – a big drought ...The smoking moon hid in the clouds*), whilst vocabulary reflects the purpose of the writing and is often precise (*complaining...mercy...gulped...bargain ...gathered... peered...declared...Snarling...impale*).

The use of the imperative to introduce the 'Most brutal ball game' combines with repetitive patterning to capture the reader's interest (*Imagine a ball game so deadly...so popular...so brutal...so horrific*). Facts are presented succinctly, typically through single clause sentences (*The greatest court ever was...It is 225 feet wide...It was an I shaped court...As a celebration the victorious participants were given a great feast*), whilst limited co-ordination and subordination, including relative clauses, offer additional detail (*If the ball dropped or placed through a small hoop the game would end... In this treacherous sport they had consequences that were a matter of life and death*). Despite the directness of the opening and closing, a more impersonal tone is adopted to detail various aspects of the game, e.g. through the use of passive constructions (*feet were not allowed...it was said...was often connected*), the present perfect (*you might have considered*), and more formal constructions (*some sources suggest...Sources suggest*). Vocabulary supports the purpose of writing and is mostly appropriate (*protective...objective...treacherous...participants...ritual...symbolized...endurance*).

In the letter of complaint, the writer exhibits an emerging understanding of formality which is not yet secure. Where deployed, more formal structures add gravity to the response, e.g. through the use of passive and perfect forms (*I am unfortunately compelled...we had been expected...my father had to be taken*); the subjunctive (*If I were you*); conjunctions and modal verbs (*whilst celebrating...I shall be seeking*); and some apt choices of vocabulary (*encountered...unacceptable...consume... received*). However, the narrative is interspersed with language more resonant of speech which serves to weaken the effectiveness of the piece: the rhetorical question (*How rude was that?*); abbreviation (*adverts*); and informal constructions and vocabulary (*neither me or my brother...Mum and Dad...my dad started to regurgitate...closing up*) all serve to weaken the effectiveness of the piece.

The balanced argument achieves a relatively formal tone, e.g. through the use of agentless passive constructions (*are being jailed ...could be spent*) and the present perfect (*there has been much debate*), albeit with occasional inappropriate shifts to a less formal tone (*I'll let you...like the Grenfell Tower had a place of respect...it's just an act...here's why*). Multi-clause sentences link related points (*This raging discussion is of vital importance because many street artists are being jailed while others are being paid to create this...*), whilst relative clauses convey information succinctly (*a legitimate art form that deserves respect...the trees that were animal's habitats*), and parenthetical asides offer greater clarity (*in the 1960s... from the tax payer*).

The use of the past perfect in the opening of the short story offers a thinly veiled word of caution to the reader and hints at the unfortunate outcome (*If only Jake had listened...if only he had heeded the warnings*). The informal language of speech captures the typical schoolboy banter as the friends discuss the situation: contracted forms (*Let's...don't...won't*); the flat adverb (*quick*); and informal vocabulary (*Yeah...bye...OK*) all contribute to the credibility of the tale. Multi-clause sentences contrast the clipped conversation with the final part of Jake's journey, slowing the pace and prolonging the suspense (*An uneasy mist came over swallowing everything in its path...A strike of lightning pierced the jet black sky, illuminating a ghostly figure...He was out but Jake felt a strange feeling that something was watching him*).

The pupil can:

- use a range of devices to build cohesion (e.g. conjunctions, adverbials of time and place, pronouns, synonyms) within and across paragraphs.

A range of devices is used to build cohesion within and across paragraphs.

In the myth, cohesion is primarily achieved through the use of pronouns and subject references (...in a small village...Determined to save his village...I'll do it for my village), and through the use of dialogue which supports the linkage of events (I plead for mercy ...A voice echoed... You will need to go down to the underworld ... And so it was Votan entered the forest). Adverbials, occasionally fronted, help to establish time and place, guiding the reader through the tale (Long ago in a small village near an ancient Maya city...And so it was...As he parted them...Having completed the river...Now a valley of laver...After many minutes).

Repetition of the adverb, 'so', acts to create cohesion throughout the introduction to the informative article, building reader anticipation (so deadly...so popular...so brutal...so horrific). Subheadings guide the reader through the various aspects of the ball game, whilst pronouns and synonymous noun phrases strengthen cohesion and avoid repetition (All of the players...them...the losing team...the victorious participants). The rhetorical question (Would you have the skills...?) and succinct closing statement (This is Pok-a-Pok: A Mayan ball game) link back to the opening, delivering whole text coherence.

Fronted adverbials thread throughout the letter, establishing a chronology of unfortunate events and signalling their respective consequences (As soon as...Consequently...As a result...Finally...Due to this). Pronouns, determiners and synonymous references build cohesion within paragraphs and avoid repetition (I... My younger brother...we...my Mum and Dad...my parents...you...your staff).

In the balanced argument, a range of devices builds cohesion within and across paragraphs to present and organise points for and against legalisation: fronted adverbials (Firstly...Next...Also...On the other hand...In particular); determiners (This raging discussion...Many people...This form of...Another reason...A final argument); and synonymous references (graffiti...unique art form...criminal art...an act of vandalism). The concluding paragraph links back to the opening (there has been much debate...Having debated the issue), summarising the writer's personal viewpoint through reiteration of the points raised (the fumes...create more pollution...money...could be spent on better things).

The repetitive patterning in the opening sentence of the short story brings together factors which gradually unfold through the piece (If only Jake had listened to Ben's warning...heeded the warnings they'd been given...take Rellic Alley). Dialogue bridges the opening narrative with the description of Jake's lone walk home, and the subtle reference to the 'hook' cues the reader into the impending outcome (...no...it's silver?).

The pupil:

- can use verb tenses consistently and correctly throughout their writing.

Tenses are used consistently and correctly throughout the writing.

In the myth, the simple past is the predominant form, conveying events and actions (There was a drought...Votan held his ground...the biggest sneered at him); the past progressive depicts the ongoing effect of the drought (crops and water were cutting short...), whilst the present perfect passive clarifies the underlying issue (The rain god has been captured). There is an appropriate shift to the present tense in dialogue and use of the modal verb 'will' to signal future time (...I plead for mercy...We will all starve).

In the informative article, the writer shifts appropriately between the present and past tense. A sense of immersion in the game itself is achieved through use of the simple present in the opening paragraph (This is Pok-to-Pok...game that is so brutal...the winning captain gets decapitated). The simple past, including the passive form, is used to narrate the historical aspects of the game (courts were constructed of...If the ball dropped...games

went on...the losing team were sacrificed), whilst the simple present references current opinion (Sources suggest...The game is important in the Mayan myth).

Shifts in tense are also appropriate to the letter of complaint: the simple present is used to state the reason for writing (*I am unfortunately compelled*), whilst past tense forms are used to recount the mishaps and consequences of the visit (*I asked...I was horrified...I had to spend...was closing up*).

The predominant use of the present tense in the balanced argument is appropriate to its form, emphasising current opinion and the writer's views (*others are being paid...it's just an act of vandalism...the world remains divided...I also feel strongly*), whilst supporting detail is conveyed through occasional use of the present perfect and simple past (*graffiti became more widespread...has been much debate...were animal's habitats*).

In the short story, past tense forms are sustained throughout the narrative: the past perfect clarifies that the outcome has already been decided (*If only Jake had listened...had heeded*), whilst the simple past conveys the events of the day (*came over...snagged...stumbled*) and the past progressive hints at the persistent presence of the murderer (*someone was watching him*). The shift to the present tense in speech is wholly appropriate (*He won't get us...this is my stop*).

The pupil can:

- use the range of punctuation taught at KS2 mostly correctly (such as inverted commas and other punctuation to indicate direct speech).

A range of punctuation is used mostly correctly:

- commas mark fronted adverbials and clauses
  - *Determined to save his village, Brave Votan decided to visit...* [Piece A]
  - *More than just a game, Pok-to-Pok was a Holy ritual...* [Piece B]
  - *Finally, when we started to consume our soup...* [Piece C]
  - *In particular, the fumes that are given off...* [Piece D]
- Commas, brackets and dashes for parenthesis
  - *(so the ball didn't hurt them)...* [Piece B]
  - *– some sources suggest that the ball was not allowed...* [Piece B]
  - *...to enjoy the movie that we had been expecting, to my surprise, an 18 certificate...was screened...* [Piece C]
  - *...when this money – from tax payers – could be spent...* [Piece D]
- dashes to mark the boundary between independent clauses
  - *...it should not be legalised – here's why...* [Piece C]
- colons to mark the boundary between independent clauses:
  - *The end was right in front of him: he ran...* [Piece E]
- semi-colons to mark the boundary between independent clauses:
  - *The crops and water were cutting short; citizens were becoming ill...* [Piece A]
  - *...that...should be legalised; these are a few examples of why...* [Piece D]
  - *The overgrown weeds snagged at his ankles; below was a carpet of decaying leaves...* [Piece E]
- speech punctuation
  - *"Oh Chac I plead for mercy," he whispered...* [Piece A]
  - *"Yeah, we should," agreed Jake...* [Piece E]
- hyphens
  - *Pok-to-Pok...* [Piece B]

The pupil can:

- spell correctly most words from the year 5/6 spelling list, and use a dictionary to check the spelling of uncommon or more ambitious vocabulary.

Words from the statutory year 5/6 spelling list are correctly spelt  
(*ancient...Determined...bargain...immediately... suggest...sacrificed...symbolised...environmentally...*).

The spelling of more ambitious vocabulary is mostly correct  
(*treacherous...appalling...quivering...regurgitate...technique... legitimate*), suggesting possible use of a dictionary.

The pupil can:

- maintain legibility in joined handwriting when writing at speed.

Handwriting is joined and legible.

Why is the collection not awarded the higher standard?

The collection cannot be awarded 'working at greater depth within the expected standard' because the pupil does not exercise an assured and conscious control over levels of formality through manipulating grammar and vocabulary.

Writing is often lively and engaging and the pupil is clearly beginning to emerge as a writer, experimenting with literary technique; however, they have yet to secure control over more ambitious grammatical constructions, especially when writing for more formal contexts. This results, at times, in some weakening of the intended effect (*He had a sigh of relief...some people can argue the opposite side...I was horrified to be replied to with...if only he didn't take Rellic Alley*). Similarly, although the pupil draws on a broad range of vocabulary, word choice is at times imprecise or repetitive, weakening the intended meaning and level of formality (*As he leaned forwards he accelerated forwards...protective gear...gets decapitated...This raging discussion...*).

The balanced argument and the letter of complaint demonstrate some grasp of the appropriate register; however, neither piece manages to sustain the required level of formality, either through choices of vocabulary or the manipulation of grammatical structures (*these are a few examples of why they believe this...so neither me or my brother knew the plot*).

Furthermore, the range of punctuation taught at key stage 2 is not used precisely to enhance meaning when necessary. Although writing evidences a range of punctuation, errors and omissions often result in ambiguity of meaning (*Quick thinking Votan grabbed the bone...Sources suggest that the losing team were sacrificed to the gods and possibly the successful captain as it was said... Having debated the issue; the world remains divided*).