

GCSE ENGLISH

A guide for parents and carers

The four exams in 2027, how they are marked and how to help at home

Most students sit two English GCSEs: English Language and English Literature. This guide describes the AQA papers, which our resources are written for. Your child's school can tell you which exam board and which set texts your child is taking.

The four exams

Paper	What it asks	Time	Date in 2027
English Literature Paper 1	A Shakespeare play and a 19th-century novel: one essay on each, starting from an extract	1 hour 45 minutes	Wednesday 12 May
English Literature Paper 2	A modern play or novel, poems from the AQA anthology, and two poems your child has not seen before	2 hours 15 minutes	Wednesday 19 May
English Language Paper 1	Four reading questions on a fiction extract, then a piece of descriptive or narrative writing	1 hour 45 minutes	Monday 24 May
English Language Paper 2	Four reading questions on two non-fiction sources, then a piece of writing that argues a point of view	1 hour 45 minutes	Tuesday 8 June

Dates are from AQA's timetable for June 2027, and every paper starts in the morning. The Literature papers are closed book: students cannot take their copies of the texts into the exam.

Mocks

Most schools hold Year 11 mocks in November or December, and many hold a second round in February or March. The school will give you its dates.

How the papers are marked

GCSEs are graded from 9, the highest, to 1. A grade 4 is a standard pass and a grade 5 is a strong pass.

Essays and longer answers are marked in levels: the examiner places the answer in a level, then gives it a mark within that level. Literature essays have six levels, from "Simple, explicit comments" at Level 1 to "Convincing, critical analysis and exploration" at Level 6.

Our resources set every task at three levels of support: Securing (aiming for a 4), Strengthening (aiming for grades 5 to 6) and Soaring (aiming for grades 7 to 9). The level names describe the tasks. They say nothing about what your child is capable of, and students step up a level when the work starts to feel comfortable.

How you can help

- Make sure your child has their own copy of each set text. Any edition works.
- Aim for short, regular sessions: about 30 minutes a day, five days a week.
- Ask them to teach you. Choose a character or theme and ask for three quotations and what each one shows. Explaining out loud shows quickly what they know and what needs another look.
- As the exams get closer, ask for one timed answer a week, written in the real time with no notes, then compared with a model answer.
- For the Language papers, any sustained reading counts: novels, long newspaper or magazine articles, travel writing. Paper 1 uses fiction from the 20th or 21st century, and Paper 2 pairs a 19th-century source with a modern one.
- The night before an exam: one read through the quotation lists, black pens and a spare in the bag, and bed at the usual time.

Revision packs

Our revision packs are written for AQA GCSE English. Each one has a revision workbook with answers at the back, model answers at grades 4, 6 and 8–9 with notes on what earns each grade, and six weeks of short practice at all three levels. They are PDFs to print at home.

The packs, a free twelve-week Year 11 countdown and a free Thesis Statement Builder are at btl.education.