

Target level 7: revising for the SATs writing tests
TWELVE SHORT EXERCISES

1. A Booklist of Smart Books for Year 9s.
Try to read at least one of these before the SATs

Michael Frayn	<i>Spies</i>
Kevin Brooks	<i>Martyn Pig</i>
Alan Gibbons	<i>The Edge</i>
Mark Haddon	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time</i>
Gillian Cross	<i>Chartbreak</i>
David Almond	<i>The Fire Eaters</i>

2. Writing to persuade/ argue/ advise Gathering ideas

Aristotle identified three strands to persuasion. Persuasion has to be **logical**. There must be a sense to what you are being asked to do. This is easy. “I need ten pounds, please mum, so I can go into town with my mates.” This helps the reader *think about the case you are making*.

Persuasion has to be **emotional**. “You don’t want me to be the only one of us who isn’t there, do you mum? Angela’s going. Her mum’s given her twenty pounds.” This helps the reader *feel* the case you are making. (This *emotional* case is often reflected in the *language* you choose to use.)

Persuasion should have a **social dimension**. In other words, there should be something in a piece of persuasive writing which claim that things generally will be better if people do as you advise. This can be hard, but it’s worth thinking about. “We all have to learn to be independent, mum.”

Practise this by completing the following table:

<i>argue this case</i>	logical	emotional	social
Year 9 deserve a day out after the SATs			
Providing every family with clean water is a key step to overcoming poverty			
The school should have a girls’ football team			

3. Apostrophes

In the following phrases, an apostrophe is missing. In all these examples, the apostrophe shows that a word or a phrase has been shortened through the **omission** of letters. Write in the apostrophe in the right place.

he isnt here	they dont know	the eggs here
its too late	she cant come	it wouldnt be possible
she shouldve come	I wont be there	this rooms too hot

In the next set, the apostrophe is needed to **show possession**. Remember the rule: (1) write down the words the way they sound; (2) identify the “owner” and **put the apostrophe immediately after the owner**.

For example:

The cats bed. Who is the owner (of the bed)? The cat. SO: The cat’s bed.

The childrens library. Who is the “owner” (of the library)? The children. SO: The children’s library.

[PLURALS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!]

Of course, there’s a catch here. One of the phrases does not need an apostrophe at all.

in a years time	the divisions best teams	the seven sorrows
the strangers bag	The Smiths best album	Sylvias ring
the schools reputation	Johns house	Dave Bells three guitars

4. Writing to describe/ inform/ explain Travel writing

Travel writing - at its best - combines *description*, *information* and *explanation*. A good piece of travel writing can really help us understand something about how to write to *describe*, *inform* or *explain*. Read this article and pay attention to how it 'works'.

The Cultural Tourist: Love, death, betrayal, bullfighting - see Carmen on her home turf *by Ian Irvine*

It sounds like a killer pub quiz question and probably is. Which city is the most popular setting for opera? The answer is Seville, where 128 operas have been set. The majority are entirely forgotten, but the city does provide the venue for six of the best-known and finest works in the repertory: Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, Verdi's *The Force of Destiny*, Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Bizet's *Carmen*, still the most popular opera in the world.

Until now the Andalusian capital has done little to exploit this quirk of cultural history, but that is about to change. This September will see the inauguration of the Seville International Music Festival and its highlight will be nine performances of *Carmen*, not in the city's opera house, but in various unconventional venues around the city. The production is being organised by Opera on Original Site, whose previous successes include staging Puccini's *Turandot* at The Forbidden City in Beijing, Verdi's *Aida* at the temple of Luxor in Egypt and Verdi's *Nabucco* in Jerusalem.

The first acts - at the tobacco factory and the smugglers' camp in the mountains - will be staged on the immense terrace and gardens of the Plaza de España, a 19th-century imitation neo-Renaissance palace. After a two-hour break for dinner, the 8,000 opera-goers will be transported either by horse-drawn carriage (or more prosaically by coach and on foot) to the Plaza de Toros, a kilometre further up the Guadalquivir river. In the bullring they will join 5,000 Sevillianos (who will have been following the earlier action on giant screens) to watch the denouement.

Those who might suspect that there might be more than an element of dumbing-down in the inflation of Bizet's opera into such a mammoth spectacle should look at the quality of the artists involved. Heading the line-up of four *Carmens* is Angela Gheorghiu, one of the world's leading sopranos; the production is in the hands of the Oscar-winning film director Carlos Saura (who created an electrifying flamenco *Carmen* on film 20 years ago), assisted in lighting design by Vittorio Storaro, long-time director of photography on Bertolucci's films, as well as *Apocalypse Now*; musical direction is under the conductor Lorin Maazel, music director of the New York Philharmonic.

The fortnight of the festival will also include concerts by the New York Philharmonic and the Russian National Orchestra and recitals by such celebrated musicians as Rostropovich, Vengerov and Lang Lang.

As the organisers have to sell 100,000 tickets, considerable effort is going into marketing one-, two- and three-night packages that range from the easily affordable to the ultimate in corporate hedonism. Seville is a beautiful city with a great deal to recommend it, even without an opera to see.

If you enjoy yourself, you can return next year, when *Fidelio* will be performed in the immense ruins of the Roman amphitheatre in Italica, four miles north of Seville. And *Don Giovanni* is planned for 2006 to coincide with the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth - this could be the start of a new annual arts fixture.

Seville International Music Festival: 2 -12 September; (00 34 954 50 66 10; www.carmeninsevilla.com)

5. The ‘trick’ opening.

You will gain significant marks if your writing shows you can use both **complex** and **simple** sentences. So let’s do that straight away with the ‘trick’ opening, which always works.

In the ‘trick’ opening, we compose a beautifully phrased complex sentence, which will be relaxed, long and a little complicated. Then we finish our opening paragraph with a short, simple sentence which gets right to the point. In this way we compose an excellent opening paragraph *and* show we can handle these two kinds of sentence.

In Africa, as in many other parts of the world, it is the women who have to fetch water, often by travelling many miles on foot across inhospitable terrain to reach distant sources, which are often polluted or unhygienic. These women deserve our help.

That opening sentence is a *complex* sentence, of course, not just because it is long, but because it contains *subordinate clauses*. The clause “who have to fetch water” is a subordinate clause. It could be a sentence on its own: “They have to fetch water”, but by using a *subordinating word* (“who”) we can bring it into our main sentence. “Which are often polluted or unhygienic” is another subordinate clause. (I also like the way the long sentence echoes the length of the women’s walk.)

The second sentence isn’t just short: it’s a simple sentence with one subject, “these women”, one verb, “deserve”, and one object, “our help”.

Now: let’s practise. (Use the back of the sheet if you need more space.)

Essay	Opening paragraph
<i>My favourite place</i> (describe)	
<i>Year 9 deserve a day out after the SATs</i> (persuade)	
<i>Recommend a film to a friend</i> (review)	

5. Non-fiction beginnings.

The rule for non-fiction beginnings is that they *sum up the argument or information you're about to read*.

Sometimes, for specific effect, this summing up will incorporate a *key image* which appeals to your imagination and emotion.

We've already seen how this might work.

In Africa, as in many other parts of the world, it is the women who have to fetch water, often by travelling many miles on foot across inhospitable terrain to reach distant sources, which are often polluted or unhygienic. These women deserve our help.

Here is another example, taken from this week's newspapers:

Rubaei street in Baghdad's Zayuna district is one of the city's unknown oases of normality, far away from the more famous Kindi street of Harthiya or 14 Ramadan street of Mansour in the centre of the city. On either side of the wide and brightly lit boulevard good restaurants are open well into the night, the sidewalks are crowded with families and even young couples; expensive cars slowly cruise the street, young men gazing at the crowds of girls in tight clothes. I was sitting outside at dusk (staring at them too) with my Iraqi friend Rana in a fresh fruit juice and ice cream restaurant called Sandra. Rana ate imported ice cream, explaining that she did not eat the local ice cream for fear of nuclear contamination in the milk. She noted that the scene before us reminded her of the days before the war, when she would go out at night with her sisters, unafraid of the dangers that keep women sequestered in their homes today.

Comment here how on this is an effective opening:

Read these openings to non-fiction pieces and comment on their effect:

<p>What is there left to say about <i>The Passion of the Christ</i>?</p>	
<p>Last weekend, nearly 50 years after his professional debut, Bernard Haitink began his 75th birthday concert series at the Barbican with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra: the orchestra he grew up listening to, the orchestra of which he was Principal Conductor for 24 years, the orchestra of which he is now Honorary Conductor. The faces of the players may have changed, but the technique, sensibility and sound remain exceptional.</p>	
<p>When it was first published in 1908, <i>Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Good Citizenship</i> became an immediate bestseller.</p>	
<p>For most of its millions of fans, <i>Footballer's Wives</i> is a racy TV drama charting the exploits and bitter jealousies of its cast of spoilt and glamorous stars. But for the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, it chronicles a piercingly accurate parable of all that is wrong with morality in Britain.</p>	
<p>Levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have jumped abruptly, raising fears that global warming may be accelerating out of control.</p>	

6. The semi-colon

(1) The semi-colon links two sentences which are closely related grammatically and thematically. To be really effective, the two parts of the sentence should work as 'separate' sentences. Read these examples from today's papers, and see how the semi-colon works. It's like a joining device without a joining word.

Don't over-use it: you might just use one or two in a SATs essay. Most of the time, sentences will just be ended with a full-stop. Make sure you never use a semi-colon (or a comma!) when you should use the plain old full stop.

(2) The semi-colon is also used to *divide items in a list*, when those items are long phrases (rather than single words or short phrases, when we use just a comma). Such a list is often, but not always, introduced by colon.

Read these examples of sentences using semi-colons, in both ways, all of which are from this week's newspapers:

In 1914, the 42-storey Smith Tower was completed; for a short while it was the tallest building in the world outside New York.

British children grew up on it; British soldiers trained on it; British doctors recommended it to pregnant British women; and British holidays were built loyally around it. Where would Britain be without its mighty fish and chips?

Their early singles tapped into the fears and frustrations of Sixties youth; on 'My Generation', their signature tune, Roger Daltrey sounded like a stuttering teenager, while Townshend provided the explosive riffs.

Organs don't, it seems, go on forever; they need expensively regular refurbishment.

In the Royal Festival Hall, it was standing room only; a thrilled audience of organistas seemed to have come from all over the country.

Now: your turn. Four new sentences featuring a semi-colon, please.

7. Fiction beginnings

Read these openings and comment on how effective they are.
What can we learn from them?

	Effectiveness	What can we learn from this?
<p>I bought the tin of sardines in Borough market, the gourmet-food version held on the site of the ordinary fruit and veg one on the third Saturday of every month. Portuguese sardines, that I picked out from the surrounding jars of ground pimiento, heaps of chorizos, and plump-hipped bottles of white wine scrambled together on the lace-covered trestle table. I chose them simply because the tin they came in was foreign and beautiful: not oblong but oval, labelled in scarlet and yellow, with swirly blue lettering in Portuguese and a picture of a booted and sou'westered fisherman holding up a monster fish by its tail.</p> <p><i>Michele Roberts, Playing Sardines</i></p>		
<p>When I was twelve years old God spoke to my father for the first time. God didn't say much. He told my father to be a painter, and left it at that, returning to a seat amongst the angels and watching through the clouds over the grey city to see what would happen next.</p> <p><i>Niall Williams, Four Letters of Love</i></p>		
<p>The house is full of voices, full of movements. Whichever room one is in, one can hear in other rooms the sounds of talk and coming and going. The windows are open to the sea, to the murmuring wash of the waves, and the salt tangy air.</p> <p><i>Jill Paton Walsh, Unleaving</i></p>		
<p>When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, boiling a potful of spaghetti and whistling along to an FM broadcast of the overture to Rossini's <i>The Thieving Magpie</i>, which has to be the perfect music for cooking pasta.</p> <p><i>Haruki Murakami, The Wind-up Bird Chronicle</i></p>		

8. The colon

A colon introduces a second section to a sentence, which somehow completes the thought of the first.

Try this: hold out your right hand, palm downwards. Turn it round so your fingers point loosely to the ceiling. Practise.

That is the gesture of the colon.

The following sentences all appeared in today's papers: read them and insert your new gesture at the colon, and you'll see how it works. (You also use a colon to introduce some kinds of list - especially where the items are long and complicated - and the gesture doesn't fit so well there.)

[One more thing: I keep using colons myself. They're a very useful tool when you're trying to catch the rhythms of speech, for example.]

But don't over-do it: you only need one or two in a SATs essay!

Last year, Ben Anderson set off for a holiday in West Africa. First stop Liberia. One small problem: the country was in the middle of a revolution.

Put simply: what has happened to teen spirit?

The majority of the gardens admit the public on just a handful of days each year: the rest of the time they remain strictly private.

At one end of the table are Raffaella's dishes: bruschetta, crostini ...

The set looks starkly beautiful: flagstones and a steel wall.

Now: your turn. Four new sentences featuring a colon, please.

9. Punctuation of speech.

Read this extract from *Secret Water* by Arthur Ransome:

‘All hands!’ said Daddy, as they sat down to breakfast.

‘Wait till they’ve had their porridge,’ said Mother.

Daddy laughed.

‘Oh do tell us now,’ said Titty.

‘You heard what your mother said.’

‘Oh, Mother!’

‘You get your porridge down,’ said Mother. ‘But don’t go and eat it too quickly.’

‘Or too slowly,’ said Roger, swallowing fast. ‘Slop it in, Bridget. Bridget doesn’t know how to eat porridge. When you’ve got a mouthful in, don’t just wave the spoon about. Get it filled while you’re swallowing.’

‘Don’t you hurry, Bridgie,’ said Daddy. ‘News’ll keep.’

‘Anybody want any more porridge?’ said Mother presently.

‘Nobody does,’ said Titty.

‘What about Roger?’

For a minute or two everybody had been watching Bridget, whose eyes wandered from face to face as she worked steadily on, spoonful by spoonful. Roger looked at the porridge still left in her plate. He could have a little more and yet be done as soon as she was.

‘Yes, please,’ said Roger, and passed his plate.

Bridget eyed him balefully and put on speed. It was a very close thing. Roger was still swallowing his last mouthful while Susan was wiping a stray bit off Bridget’s chin.

Daddy looked at Mummy. She nodded.

There was a breathless pause.

Notice: the use of commas; the way the inverted commas (or speech marks) go outside the other punctuation; the way a new speaker is given a new paragraph.

Write a short conversation yourself, correctly punctuated, of course.

Aim for at least four separate, short speeches.

10. Ending fiction pieces.

The golden rule for writing fiction (which includes some kinds of descriptive writing as well as writing which *explores, imagines or entertains*) is to ***get in late and get out early***.

GET IN LATE: Don't waste time setting up your situation. Start right in the middle of things. Don't worry about trying to give your reader information later, either: just let the scene develop, and the reader will soon put things together and make sense of them. Loads of pupils' stories would be much better if the first paragraph were simply crossed out!

GET OUT EARLY: Don't bother about a 'finishing off' thing. Leaving things in mid-air is often much more effective than tying everything together. Never tell the reader how to interpret your story: this is not the modern way.

Providing an evocative - but unexplained - image can be the best way of all.

Comment on these three endings:

	<i>comment</i>
<p>He climbed into a taxi and left for the airport. It was evening already. The plane took off toward a dark sky, then burrowed into clouds. After a few minutes the sky opened out, peaceful and friendly, strewn with stars. Through the porthole he saw, far off in the sky, a low wooden fence and a brick house with a slender fir tree like a lifted arm before it.</p> <p><i>Milan Kundera, Ignorance</i></p>	
<p>And, on the air as I turn the corner at the end of the street, a sudden faint breath of something familiar. Something sweet, coarse, and intimately unsettling.</p> <p>Even here. after all. Even now.</p> <p><i>Michael Frayn, Spies</i></p>	
<p>It is six-thirty.</p> <p>Now the dark night and the deafening racket of the crickets again engulf the garden and the veranda, all around the house.</p> <p><i>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jealousy</i></p>	

11. Hearing the voice; modals

When you read the writing task you have to complete, you must think about the *audience* you are writing for, the *purpose* of your writing and the *voice* you must adopt.

Collect your thoughts and use your memory to ‘hear’ the right voice in your head: if you’re writing a report, perhaps for a newspaper, try to ‘hear’ the way a journalist speaks on the television news; if you’re persuading someone in a speech, try to ‘hear’ a teacher, for example, persuading a class to work a bit harder; if you’re explaining something, think again and try to ‘hear’ a television documentary or a good lesson where someone explains something well.

The kind of voice you hear will influence the style in which you write.

Pay attention to the voices on the television, on the news especially, as they describe and explain.

And remember how those *modal verbs* are available to make subtle points, especially about persuasion:

may might
can could
will would
shall should
must

12. Ending non-fiction pieces.

When the purpose of a non-fiction piece is clearly focused - as in much 'persuasive' writing - the conclusion tends to be a ***restatement of the main ideas***.

When the non-fiction piece is more wide-ranging, including an element of entertainment, then the endings can be more imaginative and varied. As with fiction writing, leaving the reader with a poignant image can be very effective.

Read these three endings and think about how they work:

	<i>comment</i>
<i>There are stories more terrible than those that get into print or reach the screen, and Mercedes McCambridge was that rare thing, a person who lived much of her life in that other world.</i>	
<i>Treat this CD as a box of chocolates and taste one every now and then.</i>	
<i>Quibbles apart, this is a valuable and fascinating book, crucial reading for all who love women and poetry and desire them to go together better in the future.</i>	