

Journey Essay – Marker’s Feedback

The skills needed to excel in writing your journeys essay are transferrable to the writing of your HSC discovery essay, and as such it is important to take seriously the feedback given for your preliminary yearly exam.

Each essay has been given **medals** (things you did well) and **missions** (things to be improved) using a coding system. Below is the information relevant to each of the codes given as feedback. This information includes a description of **what** each code means, with examples where relevant, as well as tips on **how** to improve this aspect of your essay if it is identified as one of your missions. Once you have read through the feedback relevant to your essay, consider how you will use this feedback when writing your discovery essay.

PT = Prescribed text.

What: The prescribed text was Winton’s ‘Big World’, which all students were required to write about. Remember that it is expected that your paragraphs on the prescribed text are very strong because this is the text you were taught by your teacher. Your analysis should be sustained, with sufficient evidence to support your argument – this means at least four quotes.

How: Reread your prescribed text a number of times, so you are very familiar with it. Use a highlighter and/or post-it notes to annotate your text, identifying key quotes relevant to the AOS concept, as well as examples of techniques used effectively to explore ideas about the concept. Mind-maps and tables are a great way to help organise and plan your ideas about a text. Discuss the text with your peers, and your teacher. Always get feedback on your draft paragraphs from your teacher. Go back through class notes, and resources provided by your teacher.

RT = Related text.

What: A related text is a text you choose yourself, to demonstrate your understanding of the AOS concept. The best related texts have literary merit, and provide opportunities to discuss the concept in a sophisticated manner. Very simple songs or picture books do not make effective related texts. Your analysis of your prescribed text should be sustained, with sufficient evidence to support your argument – this means at least four quotes.

How: It is a good idea to first select a range of texts – maybe four or five, and a range of forms – so you can consider the strengths and weaknesses of each in relation to the AOS concept and your prescribed text. Choose a related text that you enjoy, have read/viewed a number of times, and that you feel confident with – this will make it easier to relate it to any question you get in an exam. Make sure your related text is a different form from your prescribed text. Use a highlighter and/or post-it notes to annotate your text, identifying key quotes relevant to the AOS concept, as well as examples of techniques used effectively to explore ideas about the concept. Mind-maps and tables are a great way to help organise and plan your ideas about a text. Discuss the text with your peers, and your teacher. Always get feedback on your draft paragraphs from your teacher.

Q = Answering the essay question.

What: The essay question must be responded to directly, with the thesis of your essay developed around the key ideas of the essay question. The key words of this question were 'meaningful journeys' and 'new insights' and it was expected that your essay presented a thesis which developed these ideas. The best responses identified the new insights gained on the journeys explored in their texts, and explained how these insights made the journey meaningful. It is essential that you outline your thesis in response to the essay question in your introduction, and that you use the key words from the question throughout your essay (not just synonyms). Avoid writing an *implied* response to the question – the marker has a limited time to read your essay, make it clear that you understand the question and that you are answering it directly. Failure to answer the question significantly impacts your results.

How: In exam conditions, underline the key words in the question, and spend a minute or two jotting down a thesis in response to it. You should be considering how the given statement (with its key ideas) relates to each of your texts, and what evidence from each text is best to support these ideas. A good strategy is to imagine the statement given is vanilla icecream (a boring, simple statement) and your job is to make it delicious Ben & Jerry's (a sentence with specific detail, and developed sophisticated conceptual ideas). This new statement (it may be one or two sentences, depending on your ideas) is your thesis that you will argue throughout your essay. You need to practice responding to a wide range of essay questions, to ensure that your ideas about the concept can apply effectively.

Example:

'The complex nature of journeys, at times, compels individuals to make significant decisions between competing alternatives, that lead to new insights and perspective which later in life can be evaluated.'

'When faced with realities too difficult to flourish under individuals may choose to embark on imaginative journeys to gain insights lacking in reality.'

'Through purely imaginative journeys, one may gain insights into problems faced globally, through being distanced from reality.'

E = Including sufficient evidence from your text(s).

What: In order to effectively argue your thesis, you need sufficient evidence from your texts to support your points. You should have no less than four quotes/evidence per text, as any less than this does not allow you to fully develop your ideas. Quotes should be relatively short – nothing longer than one sentence – and can sometimes be just one or two words. It is essential that the quotes you choose to include in your body paragraphs are actually relevant to the essay question, and to your thesis. Do not include quotes just for the sake of it.

How: When reading your text, highlight the best quotes that provide evidence of ideas about the AOS concept. It is helpful if the quotes you select are also evidence of literary techniques used by the composer, however this is not always necessary. You should prepare more quotes than you will need to write in your essay, as this allows you to choose the best ones to suit the question given in the exam. To remember your quotes, you may need to use flashcards, record

yourself reading them to listen to whilst walking/jogging/sleeping, or use a mnemonic you devise.

A = Including sufficient analysis of your text(s).

What: Analysis of a text is more than simply identifying a technique. The purpose of analysis is to identify how and why a technique has been used to evoke a specific response. Do not claim that a technique has an unrealistic effect (e.g. alliteration develops ideas about alienation and loss) simply for the sake of identifying a technique. Avoid repeating the same technique (not everything is a metaphor!) because you must discuss a range of techniques used by the composer. Your analysis should relate back to the concept being explored, and the specific ideas in the essay question where possible.

How: Avoid finding quotes first, then trying to identify techniques in them. It is much more effective to identify techniques first, and typically a technique that is used frequently by a composer is the best type to discuss. When you're reading a text you should pay close attention to its style, and ask yourself what effect that style has on you as a responder. Asking questions is one really effective way to deconstruct/analyse a text: Is there a lot of tension? How is it created? Is there a lot of short sentences or dialogue? How does this make me feel? Why? Consider using a table to develop your analysis, where you identify the purpose (why did the composer choose this technique? How did they want me to respond?) and the effect (how did I respond? Did the composer achieve their purpose?) of a technique.

TS = Using effective topic sentences.

What: An effective topic sentence is fluent (easily understood), related specifically to ideas in the essay question, and clearly articulates the focus of the paragraph. If you have prepared an essay before an exam, you must adapt your topic sentences to answer the essay question – do not simply write your prepared topic sentences. Avoid trying to use overly complex language if you lack confidence with sophisticated vocabulary, as it just becomes a jumble of words that mean nothing. A strong topic sentence is conceptual, and often doesn't refer directly to a text or composer. A topic sentence should use at least one of the key words from the essay question.

How: Look at model responses. Practise writing topic sentences in response to a range of questions. Get feedback on drafts from your teacher, or peers. Highlight the key words in your topic sentence, and through your paragraph to make sure that the ideas in the body reflect those articulated in your topic sentence.

Example:

'The stagnation which comes from adherence to routine within old relationships may be overcome by a journey of self-definition, which provides insight into identity.'

'Choices may catalyse an individual's escape from a dissatisfying setting, however this journey may unexpectedly allow insight into prior limiting connections which stifle growth.'

C = Exploring conceptual ideas relevant to journeys.

What: The better responses have a strong understanding of the concept being studied, and develop this beyond a superficial discussion. Weaker responses make very obvious, repetitive points about the concept and don't develop their ideas through their analysis. It is important to discuss the concept logically, for example exploring the catalyst for a journey before the consequences.

How: Mind-maps. Discussions in class with teacher and peers. Reading the rubric closely, and identifying each element in your texts using post-it notes or a highlighter. Create question and answer tables – in the first column write a question based on the rubric (what is the catalyst for the journey in this text?), in the second write your answer, and in the third identify relevant quotes. Write a range of conceptual statements, and ask for teacher feedback on them. Look at model conceptual statements. Write an essay about the concept without including any techniques or quotes – this will identify if you're actually saying anything detailed about the concept. Go back through class notes, and resources provided by your teacher.

LS = Using effective linking sentences.

What: The final sentence of your body paragraphs is summative – imagine it as a one-sentence conclusion. It must return to the main point identified in your topic sentence, and link back to the essay question, however it should not simply be the topic sentence repeated. Often the linking sentence does not refer to the text or the composer, as it is more of a conceptual summation.

How: Look at models. Practice writing linking sentences in your drafts. Get feedback on drafts from your teacher, or peers.

Example:

'Individuals, through imaginative journeys, are able to eschew reality and in doing so gain meaningful insights into global issues.'

CQ = Contextualising quotes.

What: When introducing a quote/example from a text you must make it clear where it comes from in the text, typically in relation to the narrative if appropriate. In most cases you should include this before the quote is introduced. Weaker essays never refer to where a quote appears in a text's wider narrative/structure, and this means their sentences lack fluency, coherence and read a bit like a shopping list.

How: Look at examples. Make sure you understand/know your text very well so you are aware of where your evidence comes from in relation to the narrative/plot/structure as a whole. Try to connect your contextualised information with the concept/idea you're discussing.

Example:

'Revelations resulting from the betrayal of loyalty is accentuated after meeting Meg with, 'Biggie's gone and climbed over' symbolising the narrator's increased awareness of their incompatibility, enabling his progression and development.'
'Once the journey has begun it instantly catalyses meaningful insights, as the narrator is forced to reflect on his life choices, evident in the metaphor, "I felt I had reached the edge of something"; a power and a promise I'd never felt before' indicating how journeys, through the challenges and hardships experienced

within them, lead to a new interpretations of experiences from a different context, thus allowing important realisations and insights to be reached.'

IP = Including an effective introductory paragraph.

What: Your introduction needs to demonstrate your understanding of the AOS concept, outline your thesis that engages directly with the essay question, and identify the texts, their form, and their composers. This is your first chance to impress the marker so your language should be clear and sophisticated.

How: Look at examples. Write drafts and get feedback from your teacher, or peers. See Ms Esparraga.

Example:

'A journey is a multifaceted transition between two points, instigating personal reflection thus catalysing individual insight into their perceptions of relationships and the world around them. The arbitrary, and seemingly spontaneous nature of journeys, highlights the innate influence choices have on the ultimate direction travelled, enabling personal discovery, as well as reinforcing the necessity of risks for individual transformation. Through Tim Winton's short story 'Big World', Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken' and Patrick Osborne's animated short film 'Feast', the complex nature of journeys and their ability to provoke meaningful personal revelations is conveyed.'

CP = Including an effective concluding paragraph.

What: You must write a conclusion to your essay, failure to do so will cost you marks. Your conclusion needs to summarise the main points you have made in response to the question, and restate the names and composers of the texts discussed. Effective conclusions often end with a memorable statement about the concept.

How: Look at examples. Write drafts and get feedback from your teacher, or peers. See Ms Esparraga.

Example:

'Conclusively, the texts 'Big World' by Tim Winton, 'Survivors' by RS Thomas, and Moonrise Kingdom by Wes Anderson provide insight into how journeys may provoke meaningful changes and realisations in an individual's life. This value is examined through the different catalysts, obstacles and consequences of a journey which highlight how the undertaking of a journey, whether or not by choice, fosters a heightened self-understanding and aids an individual's ability to derive satisfaction with their context.'

V = Using a sophisticated vocabulary.

What: Using a wide vocabulary adds to the sophistication and fluency of an essay. Avoid repeating the same words (e.g. shows, highlights, voyager, this) throughout your essay. Synonyms for key concept words is important (e.g. journeys, obstacles, choices).

How: Read widely – not just literary fiction texts, but also media/news texts of high quality, and academic writing. Don't just use synonyms in Word – this often makes your writing sound silly, actually understand what a word means, and when it is best to use it. See Ms Esparraga. Look at model responses.

S = Writing a sustained response.

What: A sustained response is one that is long enough to fully develop a detailed and complete argument in response to the question. A lack of evidence, and development of ideas often meant students were writing much shorter responses than necessary. You should aim for around 900 words.

How: Write draft essays and seek teacher feedback. Make sure you have sufficient evidence in each paragraph – at least four quotes – and that all ideas are developed fully. Write in complex sentences. Practice writing under examination conditions at home. Look at model responses.

TM = Time management.

What: Failing to complete your essay because you ran out of time. Try to avoid big gaps where you plan to ‘go back and finish’ but you don’t.

How: Practise writing under examination conditions at home. Keep your eye on the time in the exam. Plan to write a conclusion, even if it is only one sentence.

H = Handwriting.

What: Illegible scripts because of messy handwriting, or very, very small handwriting.

How: Practise writing under examination conditions at home. Write less if it means your writing will be illegible, meaning you are rushing less – if we can’t read it, we can’t mark it. See Mr Martin about special considerations if your handwriting is to the point that you can’t improve. Write bigger!

AG = Writing a logical, and sophisticated argument.

What: A strong essay develops a logical argument. This means that the points you are making about the concept lead to a necessary conclusion. Weaker essays lack a central argument, and simply list a series of points about the concept. For example, for a journeys essay one typically discusses catalysts for a journey, the obstacles or choices made during the journey and then the impact of these on the journey’s outcome for the individual. Some essays failed to discuss these aspects in logical order, if at all.

How: If -> then is a good approach to a thesis. All good arguments revolve around the notion of cause and effect, and often this follows the structure of a narrative (beginning, middle, end). Write your thesis statement first – ensuring it has two or three main components, and seek teacher feedback on it. Write your essay as ideas only first, before you put in your analysis and techniques, to see if it has a logical flow.

SPG = Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar.

What: Many students were misspelling a number of words, using punctuation incorrectly (often full stops were used where commas should have been, and the possessive apostrophe used unnecessarily for plurals) and sentences were grammatically incorrect affecting the fluency of ideas.

How: See Ms Esparraga.

SS = Sentence structure.

What: Better essays write complex analytical sentences in the body of their paragraphs on each text. These sentences introduce an idea about the text related to the topic sentence focus, and then support this with identification of a technique, inclusion of a quote and then explanation of the purpose/effect of the technique in relation to their main idea. These writers do not begin their sentences with a technique, or a quote – their sentences always begin with ideas. It is important to master writing complex analytical sentences as this allows you to say more in less words – lexical density – and therefore use all 900 words to argue your thesis! Weaker students write in a series of very short sentences, which often have too much plot recount, only make a statement about the concept, or simply identify a technique, add a quote and very briefly state the effect of the technique.

How: Look at examples. Use the ITEE (idea – technique – example –effect) sentence structure. Write your essay with just ideas first, and add analysis and evidence later. Write drafts and get feedback from your teacher, or peers. See Ms Esparraga.

Example:

‘The significance of choosing the most appropriate path is highlighted further on in the poem in the protagonist’s wary tone, ‘looked down as far as I could’, emphasising individuals’ desire to choose the correct path for them that will ultimately shape their future.’

‘The expedition initially provides fresh outlook and relief of the consequential stress evident in the staccato sentences, ‘We get the giggles. We go off... I am laughing. I’m kicking the dash” highlighting the understated power of physical journeys to offer greater freedom of expression.’

‘The severity of inexperience and subsequent need for development is expressed through the contrasting colouring of sepia in Dorothy’s Kansas scenes to the three-strip technicolour when she enters Oz, an allegorical projection of her superficial and naïve desire to escape detriment and lack of personal means of adventure.’

‘Additionally, the restrictive nature of problematic relationships is highlighted during the bonfire party where personification in, ‘The burning kite consumed its own tail’, foreshadows the degeneration of the boys’ unstable relationship, subsequently allowing for insight into the obstacles in the way of the narrator’s progression and success.’