

## writing to argue

### Planning and Structuring

- Planning will always produce a higher grade. The examiner looks out for signs of planning in your written answer.
- Start a plan by brainstorming for lots of ideas or points. Write them down and pick out the strongest few.
- Put these strongest points into the most effective order. Think of each point as a 'signpost' that will help your reader follow your ideas.
- Stop and think! Are the points strong enough? Are some really the same thing?
- For a moment, forget the exam room. Think about this argument in the real world and try to "shape" it in your mind. Now ask yourself three questions:
  - "Is this a really strongest way I can argue for this matter?"
  - "Does this structure work well – is it convincing?"
  - "Would my reader trust my point of view?"
  - "Will it make my reader feel good or... feel a fool for holding a different view?"

### Some Basics to Remember

- ▶ Make the first sentence interesting, lively and memorable.
- ▶ Don't be overly formal – write as yourself, not some pretend older and stuffier person.
  - In the first paragraph make it clear why you are writing (but do it interestingly).
  - Think about opening with a rhetorical question or even a very brief, lively but emotional anecdote.
- ▶ Make sure you follow the conventions of the form/genre in which you are asked to write – letter, article or whatever.
- ▶ Become your future reader while you write. What tone would appeal to a reader of your writing?
  - It's a major failing to overload paragraphs with points. Many students each year lose many marks by doing this – especially the opening paragraph which should do no more than introduce your topic and state your overall view on it.
- ▶ Help your writing to flow smoothly by linking ideas with "connectives" such as, 'and so...', 'but when...', 'moreover...', 'in the light of...', 'of course...', 'therefore...', 'however...', 'in spite of this...', 'nevertheless...', 'sometimes, of course...', 'firstly...', 'secondly...', 'although...', 'if only...', 'so you can see...', 'thinking about this...', 'to conclude...'. There are very many!
- ▶ Recognise the main opposing view but never agree with it fully; however, do show you are fair-minded and have thought about the whole issue. Make sure you show why your way will achieve a shared goal better than the 'other' way your opponent holds to.
- ▶ End with a strong sentence that will stick in your reader's mind.

### An example!

Write an article for a magazine aimed at parents in which you **argue** the case for or against teenage children being allowed to have a television in their bedroom.

# Why You're Right To Say NO!

Should teenagers be allowed to have their own television in their room? This is a question that at some point most parents will be faced with. And in the face of the usual teenage onslaught of, "It's not fair!" and "You don't understand!" it would be very easy to give in. The question is whether this is the responsible thing to do or not.

Of course, we all want to have happy and fulfilled children in our families. But, the answer to this question must surely be a resounding 'No!'. Television can be "a very bad thing" and it is important that you don't lose sight of this in the face of the 'electronic culture' that is gradually taking over children's lives. With teenagers being encouraged - even at school - to use new technology all of the time, they might see it as "ridiculous" that they can't have free access to what seems an 'old technology' of television. But consider your own parents or grandparents. Did they have a television in their rooms? Of course they didn't. Yet they still managed to grow up as healthy and happy individuals. Try telling that to your son or daughter.

Of course, there are many reasons why teenagers shouldn't have a television of their own. First and foremost is the effect that it would have on their education. A television in a bedroom will cause a potentially huge distraction from homework and study. Most teenagers, given the choice between TV and homework, will choose "Doctor Who" over revising algebra. Of course, it would be foolish to say that TV does not have a place in a healthy, modern lifestyle – and everyone, of course, needs to have time out to chill from the stresses of life at school. But TV producers aren't primarily concerned about children's futures. No. They often have advertising to sell and modern teenagers have lots of money to spend, so, like heck are they going to lose an audience if they can help it – especially one as easy to sell to as the modern fashion-conscious 'cool' teenager. TV shows are made to be massively compelling and it takes the strongest will to press that red button on the remote. And, of course, what does happen when that bedroom TV screen finally does dwindle to a point of bright white light. The computer screen is turned on....

And there are other ways that television can affect your child's education. After a heavy night's viewing, they will find it much more difficult to concentrate at school because they are tired and anyway, prefer discussing the previous night's viewing than concentrate on their work in the classroom.

Far from helping them to socialise as they will claim it does ("But mum, it's something to talk about the next day..."), too much TV and computer viewing could actually impede the social development of your teenager. How can they develop the social skills necessary for modern life if they isolate themselves in their bedroom for hours on end?

So, as a teenager myself, you can take it from me. Say "No!" when the question comes. Just try to think of a better Christmas present – how about a trip to London with their best mate? Now that is socialising!

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## To Summarise

- A plan is the key to a high grade – and not just a scribbled line or two! The exam mark scheme asks the examiner to look for evidence that the writing has been 'consciously shaped'; only planning will allow this unless you are lucky to have a rare mind that can plan as it goes (and if you have you won't need this guide – lucky person).
- Once you have your question in the exam, create a sequence of strong points which you will go on to convert into introductory sentences ('topic' sentences) for each of your 'body' paragraphs.
- Make sure at least one of these points acknowledges the main objection from the 'other side' but counters this tactfully and effectively. Put these planned points into what you feel is the strongest order.
- Always plan both your opening and a closing paragraph before you write them: use your points to 'fit in between' like a well-filled sandwich (bacon, lettuce and tomato...? M-m-m-m-m).
- Make the first sentence LIVELY, ORIGINAL and 'STRONG'.
- Find ways to sound AUTHENTIC and AUTHORITATIVE.
- In the opening make sure you instill trust in yourself and your views without sounding arrogant!
- "Forge common ground" and refer back to this in your conclusion. 'Common ground' is the shared eventual outcome both YOU and your OPPONENT desire. You are going to show them that your way is the best way!
- Use "connectives" that will help the reader follow your argument: "but...", "and so...", "moreover", "as a consequence", etc.
- Use an anecdote – nothing is more engaging for your reader than a brief story from life. It so easily creates a powerful emotional response.
- Conclude briefly by restating the common ground you hope to work towards and your main ways to achieving it.