

As part of the 11+ English exam, some schools will choose to include a creative writing element. This involves writing an essay under timed conditions. The timings will vary according to the school so it is important to find this out in advance. Children will usually be given a selection of questions that test different styles of writing and they will have to choose one question to answer. For instance, your child may be asked to write:

- a fictional story that continues a given passage
- a persuasive letter
- a description of a person or place
- an account of an experience they had
- a newspaper article
- a diary account
- a report
- an instructional text.

Alternatively, they may be given an essay title that could be applied to a number of different types of writing.

While the styles of writing are different, there are common skills being tested by all the questions. To create a solid foundation for their writing, your child should work through the grammar and punctuation and spelling and vocabulary tests in [English Rapid Tests](#). Their writing ability will also be enhanced by reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts.

It is important to practise this element of the exam so that your child becomes used to writing under timed conditions and develops an understanding of the different elements that need to be included in their writing. There are some example questions given on page 2, followed by some general marking guidance. You should also read the 'Creative writing guidance' download for ideas of what should be included in each style of writing and how to prepare.

It may be helpful to read some sample short stories written by your child's peer group, or some sample 11+ essays, and analyse these with your child. This will help them to identify the three sections of a good piece of writing that is written using language and vocabulary they can relate to. It will also help them to gain an understanding of how to write a piece that is interesting yet succinct enough to be achieved in the allotted time. They should consider what they like about the piece; what the writer has done well; and what could be improved. Ask your child to spot any spelling, punctuation or grammar errors and suggest better vocabulary or alternative beginnings and endings. They could then go on to write their own essay on the same title or topic.

Practice questions

Here are some sample practice questions. Your child could have a go at writing several different pieces of writing for each title. To gain a real understanding of just how challenging this is, and to offer truly effective support, you might like to have a go at writing some yourself!

The time limit for answering each question is 40 minutes. This should include approximately 10 minutes for planning, 25 minutes for writing and 5 minutes for checking. If you know the length of time your child will have in their actual test, adjust these timings accordingly.

Essay titles

1. The celebration
2. My hero
3. Write about a personal achievement that made you feel proud.
4. Are rules necessary? What would life be like without them?
5. Write a letter persuading your headteacher to ban school uniform.

Marking guidance

It is important that the writing fits the title and is written in an appropriate style. Questions 1 and 2 could apply to a variety of types of writing; for example, 'The celebration' could be a short fictional story or a personal account of a celebration, while 'My hero' could be a description of a person, an account of an event or a fictional short story. Question 3 should be written as a first-person account, probably in the past tense, and should include reference to why they felt proud of the achievement. Question 4 could be written as a narrative, a report or an article, and Question 5 should be a formal letter.

When marking your child's work, consider the following areas.

Structure

- For all five titles, it is important that the child has planned out their writing and that it is structured with a clear beginning, middle and ending (or introduction, body and conclusion).
- If writing a story, is the plot interesting? Many stories include a conflict or problem and a resolution.
- Writing should be organised into paragraphs.
- Where appropriate, headings, sub-headings and bullet points may be used (for example, if writing a report).
- Question 5 should be set out using the format and language of a formal letter, using 'Dear...' and 'Yours sincerely'.

Vocabulary

- Is the vocabulary varied and interesting?
- Is there a range of adjectives, adverbs and powerful verbs?
- Have they used a variety of sentence openers?
- Have they used at least one simile and one metaphor?

Description

- Have they described the setting and the characters using a range of vocabulary?
- Have they used sensory descriptions?
- Have they conveyed the characters' emotions?

Grammar

- Is the piece written in an appropriate tense, and is the tense and perspective maintained throughout? (It is quite common for children to start writing in the first person and then switch to the third person partway through.)
- Have they included a variety of sentence lengths?
- Do their sentences make sense and are they grammatically correct?

Punctuation

- Is there a range of punctuation, correctly used? Writing at this level should include the following, if appropriate:
 - question marks
 - exclamation marks
 - commas
 - direct speech
 - colons
 - semicolons
 - brackets
 - ellipsis.

Spelling

- Are common words and words on the National Curriculum spelling list for Years 5 and 6 spelt correctly?
- Have they made a good attempt at more complicated spellings?

If your child struggles with spelling, they would benefit from working through [Schofield and Sims Spelling](#).

Handwriting

- Is their handwriting neat, legible and joined?