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Training for exams – How to deal with written assignments

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf



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Die Einheit ist eine Materialsammlung für Lehrkräfte, die ihre Lernenden explizit auf Klausuren in der Oberstufe vorbereiten wollen. Die Anforderungsbereiche I, II und III werden nacheinander mit zielgerichteten Anleitungen, Hilfen und Aufgaben gründlich erarbeitet. Der Abschluss dieser Einheit ist eine Übungsklausur, in der die Schülerinnen und Schüler ihren Kompetenzerwerb demonstrieren können.

Training for exams – How to deal with written assignments

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf

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Competences and skills:

The unit contains texts and tasks that can be classified as **level B2/C1** (*Europäischer Referenzrahmen*). By working with the materials, students enhance their general **reading skills**. Furthermore, they practice their competences in explaining and analysing **texts** when working closely with the extracts and materials. Students' **speaking and presentation skills** are improved by realising short talks and presentations in small groups or in front of the class. The great majority of tasks focuses on the **writing competence** of the students including all its dimensions.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A Analysis

D Discussion/debate

S Summary

C Comment

G Group work

T Working with a text

CT Creative Task

RC Reading comprehension

W Writing

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Language awareness	M1–M2	D, G, W
2: Comprehension in written assignments	M3–M5	C, G, RC, S, T
3: Analysis in written assignments	M6–M12	A, CT, D, G, RC, T, W
4: Comment/Discussion in written assignments	M13–M15	D, RC, W
5: Creative tasks in written assignments	M16–M18	CT, RC, W
6: The final test – A standard written assignment	M19–M20	A, C, CT, RC, W

Training for exams – How to deal with written assignments

Facts

At school, students are constantly confronted with written assignments with the aim of making them fit for the final A-level exam in English. Apart from a good command in English, students need to have further skills for coping successfully with complex written tasks. A written assignment usually includes standardised language for tasks (*Operatoren*) that require the knowledge of the scope of different expressions used in the tasks. Furthermore, strategies to analyse a complex text, to characterise a protagonist, to compare and contrast situations and to analyse rhetorical devices or the narrative perspective are a must in order to succeed. Also, students must be familiar with the structure of a comment or need to know how to deal with a creative task (writing an inner monologue, finishing a story etc.). On the one hand, the focus in the classroom is usually on the oral competence but, on the other hand, the training of how to deal with a complex written assignment must not be underestimated. By working through this material, students both develop an understanding for various strategies and are offered the opportunity to practise their writing skills.

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Notes on the material

The unit presented here consists of six topics. **Topic 1** serves as an introduction and focusses on the challenges in written assignments and, in particular, on the standardised language for tasks (*Operatoren*). By matching definitions with so-called *Operatoren*, students become more familiar with the exact range of the standardised language in written assignments. **Topic 2** centres on summary writing. Guidelines for summary writing and language support are both provided. Then, they work on a text by marking the essential facts, paraphrasing certain sentences and writing a summary. After this, students are asked to exchange their summaries to give peer feedback and to reflect on strategies to overcome weak points in their texts. Finally, the general function of

summary writing is discussed. **Topic 3** centres on *Anforderungsbereich II* – the analysis of texts. In an informative text on the dimensions of analysing texts, students deal with various tasks in this field. Language support for analysing prose and non-fictional texts prepares students for the tasks on the extract from Sebastian Faulks' novel *A Week in December* (2009). By fulfilling subtasks, the final written characterisation of the protagonist Hassan is arranged. Additionally, students will work on the narrative perspective of the extract. Again, peer feedback is given on students' written products. In the second part of Topic 3, the stylistic devices, the choice of words and the message of an article from *The Guardian* have to be examined as an exercise for analysing non-fictional material. Finally, students have to design posters presenting guidelines when confronted with text analysis. **Topic 4** begins by providing essential guidelines when writing a comment or a discussion. For these tasks, language support is included. Then, students are asked to choose one of three topics to either write a comment or to discuss a given statement. **Topic 5** confronts learners with creative tasks in written assignments. With the help of a checklist when dealing with creative tasks, students tell the story of the given material from a different point of view. The text is an extract from the short story, *Saturday Afternoon*, by Erskine Caldwell and focusses on the fate of an African American in the time of racial segregation and slavery in the USA. **Topic 6** rounds off the unit by offering a final written test on the extract from a short story by South African writer Sindiwe Magona. In this test, students have to outline the situation and analyse the use of language, the tone and the atmosphere. The third task consists of either a comment or a creative writing task in connection with the presented material.

Topic 1: Language awareness

Worksheet – Written assignments: A questionnaire

1. Read the questionnaire. Respond to the tasks and tick the correct responses.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Get together with a classmate and discuss your responses to the questionnaire. Then, collect your challenges of written assignments with the entire class. Visualise your main challenges and discuss measures to be taken to improve the different skills.

M1

1. What is a written assignment? Give a definition.
2. What do you consider the greatest challenge in a written assignment? Tick one or more aspects.
 - a) time management
 - b) the tasks
 - c) the texts/materials
 - d) the English language presented
 - e) your nervousness
 - f) structuring your texts
 - g) other problems
3. Explain your main problem(s) in written assignments in a few sentences.
4. Name the strategies that you apply when writing an assignment (e.g., jotting down your main ideas before starting to write).
5. How do you usually prepare a written assignment? What applies to you?
 - a) I just read my notes again.
 - b) I learn the topic-related vocabulary.
 - c) I write some texts with the help of self-study materials.
 - d) I read my former written assignments once again.
 - e) I look up some difficult grammar rules.
 - f) I don't prepare anything.

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