

Dear Parent/Carer,

While we will continue to use class work as a way of informing our practice, we will now be administering three standardised assessments throughout the year to serve as our reporting grades. This means that all students, regardless of their teacher or the text they are studying, will sit the same paper, making the marks much more comparable. The assessments will follow a similar format over the three years, which will make it easier for students to see exactly where they are making progress and which areas they need to develop further.

We will endeavour to have all students complete the paper in the same week. However, the nature of the assessments themselves means that even if a student takes their paper later in the week, it is unlikely to give them any kind of advantage.

Because the assessments are unique to Oriel, I thought you might find it useful to have the following information regarding the papers. Each paper will have nine tasks, which will assess the following things:

Tasks 1 and 2 – Writing Speed

Students need to get used to writing accurately and at speed. Each task is a timed writing activity, where students are asked to describe two pictures. The first three-minute activity asks students just to write down everything they see whereas the second one asks them to write while focusing on spelling, punctuation and grammar. Our targets are based on average writing speeds: Year 7 – 15 words per minute, Year 8 – 17 words per minute, Year 9 – 20 words per minute. We fully appreciate that some students may be some distance from these targets initially. However, over the years, they will hopefully see that they have improved.

To help your child, set a timer and ask them to write. You might want to give them something to copy so that they are only focusing on speed not on thinking about what to write. Only write for short bursts - for example, in an advert break on television.

Tasks 3 and 4 – Terminology

Students will have a matching exercise where they need to attach a term to its definition. They will then have some examples of different devices and they will have to identify what has been used. For example, they may have the term 'metaphor' and a definition which they need to match and then read a sentence which uses alliteration and have to identify that technique.

To help your child, encourage them to make flashcards with the terminology they have covered in lesson so that you can quiz them. Ask them to give you examples. BBC Bitesize also has a number of activities that they may find helpful.

Task 5 – Writer's Choice of Language

This task will differ depending on the year group and will become progressively more challenging as the assessments go on. For Year 7, the first assessment asks them to alter the mood of a piece of writing by selecting words from a list. In Year 8, the first assessment asks them to choose a word that they think fits best in the text and explain their choice. For Year 9, the first assessment will feature a short task with some words edited. Students will be expected to discuss why those edits have been made and consider the effect the writer is trying to achieve.

To help your child, encourage them to think about why writers choose certain words and what effect this has on the audience. For example, you could ask them how advertisers make a product seem like a good thing to buy or how a match reporter makes a football game sound exciting.

Task 6 – Comprehension and Inference

Students will need to read a short text and then answer some questions on it. These questions are designed to test their understanding of what they have read. The texts and questions will become more challenging over the course of the three years.

To help your child, encourage them to read and then ask them questions about what they have read. Students can read fiction or non-fiction texts – all reading is beneficial.

Task 7 – Summary

Students will be given a table of some of the events in the piece they read for Task 6 and then asked to put the events in order. Again, this is another method of assessing how well students have understood the text.

To help your child, after watching a film or a TV programme together, ask them to give you a brief summary of what happened but insist on it being in the correct order.

Task 8 – Analysis

Building on the skills they will be developing in class, students will be asked to analyse the language and structure of the text they read for Task 6. Students will be likely to produce more advanced answers as they progress through Key Stage 3. Analysing language and structure forms almost half of the marks for GCSE Literature and nearly a quarter of the marks for GCSE Language.

To help your child, keep encouraging them to practise their written analysis. There are a lot of videos on Seneca and BBC Bitesize about how to structure analytical writing and we will do a lot of guided practice in class.

Task 9 – Creative Writing

Students will then be asked to continue the text from Task 6. They will be marked based on their ability to use paragraphs and basic punctuation correctly as well as their ability to use more adventurous vocabulary. They will also have specific features to include, which will change over the course of the assessments. Students will be expected to create a logical follow-on to the story as well as make their piece interesting and enjoyable to read.

To help your child, encourage them to keep going with their Bedrock lessons. These sessions will help students develop a wider vocabulary, allowing them to express themselves more precisely in their writing. Regular readers make better writers so please continue to encourage your child to read as regularly as they can. This will help them with ideas and phrases that they can incorporate in their own work.

Apologies for the long message but I hope you have found it useful and informative.

If you have any questions about our new Key Stage 3 assessment process in English, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,
Rebecca White
Head of English