

WRITING SKILLS

The Ultimate Guide to Essay Writing

Decode the prompt, build an argument, and fix the sentences that quietly cost marks — for any VCE English text.

CURRICULUM

VCE

LEVEL

Units 3 & 4

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What an assessor is actually reading for

Start with what the course actually asks of you. In Unit 3, Outcome 1, you are asked to "analyse ideas, concerns and values presented in a text, informed by the vocabulary, text structures and language features and how they make meaning." In Unit 4, Outcome 1, the same sentence returns with three extra words: "explicit and implicit".

Read that wording slowly, because almost everything about a good essay is hiding in it.

"Ideas, concerns and values" is the subject of your essay. Not events. Not characters as people. What the text is arguing about the world.

"Informed by" is the load-bearing phrase. Your idea is not something you have separately from the language and then support with a quote. Your idea is supposed to come out of the language. The evidence is the reason you think what you think, not the decoration you add afterwards.

"How they make meaning" tells you that naming a feature is not analysis. A metaphor is not an achievement. What the metaphor does to the reader is the point.

"Explicit and implicit" tells you that by Unit 4 you are expected to read what the text does not say out loud: what it takes for granted, what it refuses to resolve, what it makes you feel before it tells you anything.

The gap

Most students, asked what they are being marked on, will say some version of: quotes, structure, vocabulary, length, and covering the whole text. All five are real, and all five are secondary. Here is the difference between what is being counted and what is being judged.

WHAT STUDENTS OPTIMISE FOR	WHAT IS ACTUALLY BEING READ
Number of quotes	Whether each piece of evidence earns its place by making an idea possible
Following the essay structure correctly	Whether the argument develops, or just repeats in three locations
Sophisticated vocabulary	Whether the sentences say something precise
Covering everything in the text	Whether the essay answers this prompt rather than the general topic
Sounding academic	Whether a reader who knows the text well would find something to think about

There is one more thing worth knowing, because it changes how you should spend your time. The 2025 VCAA Examination Report notes that assessors treated exam responses as "a 'first draft' completed under timed conditions". Nobody is expecting a polished publication. A slightly awkward sentence carrying a real idea will always be read more generously than a smooth sentence carrying nothing. This is why the redraft checklist at the end of this guide fixes thinking before it fixes commas.

THE DISAGREEMENT TEST

Take any sentence in your essay. Ask: could someone who has read the text carefully disagree with this? If nobody could disagree, you have written a summary. Summary is not worth marks, however elegantly it is phrased. Rewrite the sentence until disagreement is possible.

THE MOST EXPENSIVE HABIT IN VCE ENGLISH

Retelling. It feels productive because the page fills quickly, and it is the single clearest signal that a response is not analysing. If a sentence would still be true and useful in a plot summary written for someone who has not read the text, it is not doing analytical work. Cut it or convert it into a claim.

Three questions your essay has to answer without being asked

1. **What is your position?** Not your topic. Your position on the specific question in front of you.
2. **Why does the text support that position?** Answered through language, structure and pattern, not through what happens.
3. **What does the reader gain by seeing it your way?** The essay should leave the text slightly changed for the person who read your argument.

Decoding the prompt

The prompt is not the topic. The topic is what the prompt is about; the prompt is a specific question about it. Students who lose marks on relevance are almost never off-topic. They are on-topic and off-prompt: they wrote the essay about power that they had prepared, when the question in front of them was about who is permitted to speak.

Give yourself two minutes before you write. Do these four things.

1. **Circle the load-bearing word.** Usually one word or phrase carries the whole question. In "the text condemns ambition", the word doing the work is "condemns", not "ambition". Your essay is about the difference between condemning, complicating, and merely depicting.
2. **Find the assumption.** Most prompts smuggle in a claim. "How does the text show that isolation destroys people?" assumes isolation destroys people. You are allowed to notice that assumption and test it. Noticing it is often the whole essay.
3. **Define the contested term in your own words.** If the prompt says "justice", decide early what the text seems to mean by justice, because the text almost certainly does not mean the dictionary definition. One clause in your introduction is enough.
4. **Decide what would have to be true.** If you are going to agree, what would you need to find in the text? If you cannot answer that, you do not yet have an argument, you have a mood.

What each prompt type demands, structurally

PROMPT TYPE	WHAT IT IS ASKING	THE SHAPE OF A RESPONSE THAT ANSWERS IT
"Discuss."	Take a position on a statement and show that you can see what makes it arguable. It is not an invitation to be neutral.	Position stated in the introduction. Two or three body paragraphs that build the case. At least one that handles the strongest reading against you and shows why the text still lands where you say it does.
"Do you agree?"	A yes or no with reasons. Full agreement is allowed. Full disagreement is allowed. "Somewhat" is only allowed if you specify exactly where the line falls.	Commit in the first paragraph. Then organise by <i>grounds</i> , not by halves. Avoid the two-paragraph seesaw where paragraph one agrees, paragraph two disagrees, and the conclusion shrugs.
"To what extent...?"	A question about degree. The answer is a measurement, so you must name the scale you are measuring on.	Say how far, and say what it is that limits it. Structure moves from where the statement holds most strongly, to where it starts to fail, to what the text is doing instead at that point.
Quote-based prompt (a line from the text, then a question)	Whether you can read one moment closely and then read outwards from it. The quote is a lens, not a decoration.	Deal with the quoted moment properly and early, including who says it and whether the text endorses it. Then test whether what is true in that moment is true across the text.
"How does the text...?"	Method, not just meaning. You are being asked about construction.	Each paragraph is built around a different technique of construction — structure, voice, patterning, what is withheld — rather than a different plot event.

DECODING A QUOTE-BASED PROMPT IN PRACTICE

Suppose the prompt quotes a character saying something like "we did what we had to do", and asks whether the text agrees.

Weak reading: treat the line as the text's message and write about necessity.

Strong reading: ask who says it, when, and to whom. Ask whether the text arranges events so that the claim looks true, or so that it looks like a story the speaker needs to believe. Ask whether anyone in the text is allowed to answer back, and what it means that they are not. Now you have an argument about the gap between what a character asserts and what the text demonstrates, which is exactly the "explicit and implicit" reading Unit 4 asks for.

A contention that argues something

A contention is not a summary of what your essay will contain. It is the sentence your whole essay exists to defend. Here is the same prompt answered four times, each version stronger than the last.

The prompt: "The text presents loyalty as more dangerous than betrayal." Discuss.

Version 1

The text does present loyalty as more dangerous than betrayal, and this is shown through the characters, the setting and the author's use of language.

What is wrong: it restates the prompt and then lists the ingredients of a text. "Characters, setting and language" describes every text ever written, so the sentence tells the reader nothing about this one. It also cannot be disagreed with, because it has not said anything.

Version 2

The text presents loyalty as more dangerous than betrayal, as seen through the protagonist's blind devotion, the collapse of the family, and the final scene.

What changed: the vagueness is gone. Three specific areas of the text are named.

Why it is still not enough: this is a plan, not an argument. Those three items are places you will go, not things you will claim. An essay built on this will produce three paragraphs that each say "here, too, loyalty is dangerous", and the argument will end exactly where it started.

Version 3

While betrayal is punished openly, the text reserves its deepest damage for characters who stay loyal, suggesting that loyalty is dangerous precisely because it is never questioned.

What changed: a claim has appeared, and it has a reason attached. The word "precisely" is doing real work: it names *why* the danger exists rather than asserting that it does. The sentence is now disagreeable, which means it is arguable.

What is still missing: it describes what the text contains, not how the text goes about persuading you. It is a statement about the story rather than about the writing.

Version 4

Betrayal in the text is loud, judged and quickly over; loyalty is quiet, praised, and permitted to do its damage across the whole narrative. By making the reader admire the loyal before it shows what loyalty costs them, the text implicates the reader in the value it goes on to dismantle, so its warning is not that loyalty is wrong but that it is the harder danger to see.

What changed, and why it is better:

- It names a **mechanism**: the order in which the text does things to the reader. That is a claim about construction, which is what "how they make meaning" asks for.
- It positions the **reader** inside the argument. The essay now has something to analyse in every paragraph — not just what happens, but what the text is doing to us while it happens.
- It carries a **qualification that sharpens rather than softens**: not that loyalty is wrong, but that it is harder to see. That gives every body paragraph a job, because each one can test the visibility claim.
- It is **falsifiable**. If the text judged loyalty as openly as betrayal, the contention would collapse. Good contentions can be wrong. That is what makes them worth defending.

TWO SENTENCES ARE ALLOWED

A contention does not have to be one sentence. Trying to compress a position, a mechanism and a qualification into a single clause is how contentions turn into sludge. Two clean sentences beat one exhausted one.

DRAFT YOURS

Paragraph architecture

You were probably taught TEEL, or PEEL, or one of its cousins. It is worth being fair to it before replacing it, because it is not wrong. It is incomplete.

What TEEL teaches correctly

- **One controlling idea per paragraph.** This is genuinely the most important structural rule in essay writing and TEEL enforces it well.
- **Evidence is not optional.** Every claim has to touch the text.
- **Evidence does not speak for itself.** The explanation step is real work, and students who skip it write worse essays.
- **Paragraphs belong to something larger.** The link step is trying to teach that a paragraph must serve the contention.

Why it plateaus

TEEL is a list of ingredients in a fixed order, and a fixed order produces four predictable ceilings.

1. **The topic sentence becomes a label.** "The author explores the theme of loyalty" announces a subject instead of making a claim. The paragraph then has nothing to prove.
2. **One claim, one quote.** The shape encourages a single piece of evidence per paragraph, which means you can never let two moments in the text press against each other. Most real insight lives in that pressure.
3. **The claim arrives before the text.** If the assertion always comes first and the quote always comes second, the evidence is being used to confirm rather than to generate. That is the opposite of "informed by".
4. **The link becomes restatement.** "Therefore, the author shows that loyalty is dangerous" returns the reader to where the paragraph began. Six paragraphs of this and the essay has not moved.

What to use instead

Keep one idea per paragraph. Drop the fixed order. Aim for five moves, which can be reordered and can share sentences.

MOVE	ITS JOB
Claim	A sentence that advances the contention one step further than the last paragraph did. Not a topic label.
Ground	The specific textual moment, quoted tightly and placed inside your own sentence.
Mechanism	How the language, structure or patterning produces the effect. This is the sentence most students skip.

MOVE	ITS JOB
Complication	A second moment that qualifies, extends or resists the first. This is what TEEL has no room for, and it is where the difference between a competent and a strong paragraph usually appears.
Consequence	What follows for the argument. It points forward, not back.

An annotated model paragraph

The text below is invented, so that the architecture is visible and no one's set text is doing the work. The moves are the point, not the material.

MODEL PARAGRAPH

The text's early insistence on order is not reassurance but warning. When the narrator describes the household as running "like a clock", the simile flatters the family and indicts it in the same breath: a clock is precise, but it is also wound by someone else. That doubleness is the text's method rather than a single clever image, and it returns at the moment of collapse, when the same phrase is spoken by a character who has just lost the power to wind anything. Because the reader has been taught to hear the second meaning, the breakdown arrives as something already accounted for rather than as a shock. What appeared to be a portrait of a stable household is therefore a slow argument about who does the winding — and the text withholds the cost of that arrangement until the final act, having quietly counted it from the first page.

SENTENCE	WHAT IT IS DOING
"The text's early insistence on order is not reassurance but warning."	Claim. Contestable, specific, and it advances a position rather than naming a theme. The "not X but Y" shape guarantees an argument.
"When the narrator describes... wound by someone else."	Ground and mechanism together. The quotation is three words long and sits inside the sentence. The analysis explains how the simile works on two levels instead of labelling it a simile.
"That doubleness is the text's method... power to wind anything."	Complication. A second moment is brought in, and it changes the first one. The paragraph is now reading a pattern, not an example.
"Because the reader has been taught... rather than as a shock."	Reader effect. Note the causal "because". Effects that are asserted are cheap; effects that are explained are not.
"What appeared to be... counted it from the first page."	Consequence. It reframes the whole text in light of the paragraph, and the word "withholds" sets up the next paragraph on what the text conceals.

THE LINK SENTENCE TRAP

If your last sentence in a paragraph could be pasted into any other paragraph of the essay, it is filler. A genuine closing sentence contains something that only this paragraph earned.

Flow

Flow is not a decorative quality. It is the reader's experience of your argument being under control. Three things produce it.

1. Signposting that carries information

A transition is not a word you put at the start of a paragraph. It is a sentence that tells the reader where the argument has got to. The test is simple: does the phrase carry any content about your argument, or is it just noise in the shape of a connective?

FILLER

"Furthermore, the author also uses symbolism to explore this idea."

"Additionally, another example of this is..."

"Moving on to the next point, the text shows..."

These say only that more writing is about to happen.

TRANSITION

"If order is the text's warning, silence is its instrument."

"This holds while the family is intact; the second half tests whether it survives their separation."

"That reading depends on trusting the narrator, which the text soon makes difficult."

Each one names a relationship between two ideas.

2. Sentence variety

Variety is not about being fancy. It is about not putting the reader to sleep with a repeated rhythm, and it comes from two habits.

Vary the opening. Count how many of your sentences begin with "The author", "This shows", or "In addition". If more than a third of them share an opening, the paragraph will read as mechanical no matter how good the ideas are. Start some sentences with a subordinate clause ("Because the reader has already..."), some with the textual moment itself, some with a short declarative.

Vary the length. Long analytical sentences are necessary — you often need subordination to hold a mechanism and its effect together. But three long sentences in a row exhaust the reader. Follow them with a short one. A short sentence after a complex one reads as confidence, and it lands the point. That contrast is the entire trick.

3. The paragraph-to-paragraph link

Weak essays connect paragraphs by topic: this paragraph was about the mother, so the next one is about the father. Strong essays connect paragraphs by *pressure*. The end of one paragraph should create a question or a tension that the next paragraph exists to answer.

BEFORE AND AFTER: JOINING TWO PARAGRAPHS

Before

"...therefore the text shows that loyalty is dangerous.

Furthermore, the author also uses the setting to explore the theme of loyalty. The house is described as cold and dark..."

After

"...so the danger is not that loyalty fails, but that it is never examined.

Nothing in the household encourages that examination. The house is described in terms that make scrutiny feel like disloyalty, so..."

What changed: the first paragraph now ends on a precise claim rather than a restatement, and the second paragraph opens by answering it. The connective word has disappeared entirely, because the logic no longer needs one. When your paragraphs are genuinely sequential, "furthermore" becomes unnecessary. Its presence is often a sign that the link is missing.

Introductions and conclusions

Three openings that waste your first sentence

- 1. The dictionary opening.** "Loyalty can be defined as a strong feeling of support." You have spent your first sentence on a definition the reader already has, and you have used a general definition in an essay whose whole job is to work out what this text means by the word.
- 2. The universal history opening.** "Throughout history, humans have always struggled with..." It is unverifiable, it is true of nearly every text, and it signals that the essay will stay general. Anything that begins "since the dawn of time" can be deleted without loss.
- 3. The plot summary opening.** "The text follows a family living in a small town who..." The reader has read the text. Summary in the first sentence sets the register for the whole essay, and it is very hard to climb out of.

A fourth, less obvious waste: opening with a quotation from a critic or from the text itself, and then explaining it. It delays your voice, and your voice is the thing being assessed.

Annotated model introduction

MODEL

[1] The text is far more suspicious of order than of chaos. **[2]** Its betrayals are loud, judged and quickly finished; its loyalties are quiet, admired, and allowed to run the length of the narrative doing damage that nobody names. **[3]** By inviting the reader to admire the loyal before revealing what loyalty costs them, the text implicates that reader in the value it then dismantles. **[4]** Its warning is not that loyalty is wrong, but that it is the danger least likely to be seen — and the text builds that blindness deliberately, first in its narrator, then in its structure, and finally in us.

- **[1] A first sentence that is already an argument.** Short, contestable, and it establishes the essay's angle in eleven words. No context, no throat-clearing.
- **[2] The distinction the essay rests on.** This is where you define the contested term on your own terms, through contrast rather than through a definition.
- **[3] The mechanism.** This sentence tells the reader that the essay is about how the text works, not just what it contains.
- **[4] Position plus a map that is made of claims.** "Narrator, structure, us" tells the reader the order of the argument without descending into "firstly, secondly, thirdly". Note that the map is a sequence of escalating steps, not a list of topics.

Nothing here names the author, the title or the genre. If your teacher or your SAC instructions require them, add them — but put them in a subordinate clause, not in the position of maximum emphasis.

Annotated model conclusion**MODEL**

[1] What the text finally exposes is not a failure of loyalty but a failure of attention. **[2]** Because the reader is taught to admire before being taught to look, the recognition arrives too late to be useful to anyone inside the narrative — and that lateness is the text's argument, not its flaw. **[3]** The clock keeps time either way; the question the text leaves open is who has been winding it, and why nobody thought to ask.

- **[1] Reframes rather than repeats.** The contention returns in different words and at a higher level of abstraction. "Failure of attention" is a step beyond where the introduction stood.
- **[2] Answers the "so what".** It explains why the argument matters to a reader, and it converts what might look like a weakness in the text into part of its design. That move signals genuine control.
- **[3] Ends on the text.** The final image comes from the essay's own analysis, so it feels earned. The unresolved question is deliberate: conclusions that end in a question the text keeps open read as thoughtful, while conclusions that end in a moral read as thin.

TWO CONCLUSION HABITS TO DROP

"In conclusion, it is clear that..." If it were clear, you would not have needed the essay. **New evidence in the last paragraph.** A quotation appearing for the first time in the conclusion has nowhere to be analysed, so it reads as an idea you ran out of time to have.

Sentence-level habits that cost marks

These are the twelve most common repairs. Each one is small. Together they are usually the difference between an essay that sounds like it is reaching for analysis and one that is doing it.

1. ANNOUNCING THE QUOTE

Before: The author uses the quote "like a clock" which shows that the family is very organised.

After: The household that runs "like a clock" is being praised for a precision that depends on somebody else doing the winding.

Why: the quotation belongs inside your sentence, not in a container labelled "quote". Integration forces you to have a grammatical relationship with the evidence, which forces you to have an idea about it.

2. NAMING THE TECHNIQUE INSTEAD OF THE EFFECT

Before: The author uses a metaphor to describe the house.

After: Describing the house as a machine strips the family of agency before a single event has tested them.

Why: identifying a device is a Year 8 skill. The outcome asks how features "make meaning", so the mark is in the second half of the sentence, not the first.

3. "TRYING TO SHOW"

Before: The author is trying to show us that loyalty is dangerous.

After: The text makes loyalty look like safety for long enough that its cost registers only in retrospect.

Why: "trying to" implies the writer failed. It also puts you in the position of guessing at intention rather than reading construction.

4. VAGUE NOUNS

Before: There are many aspects of the text that show different things about society.

After: The text's treatment of inherited debt is where its argument about class stops being descriptive and becomes an accusation.

Why: "things", "aspects", "many ways", "elements" and "factors" are placeholders for thinking you have not finished. Every one of them can be replaced with a noun that names something.

5. EMPHASIS DOING THE WORK OF ARGUMENT

Before: It is very clear that the author obviously condemns this behaviour.

After: The text withholds any sympathetic account of the decision, and that silence functions as judgement.

Why: "clearly", "obviously", "definitely" and "very" appear most often exactly where the evidence is weakest. Delete them and see whether the sentence still stands. If it does not, the problem was never the adverb.

6. THE HEDGE STACK

Before: It could perhaps be argued that the text may possibly suggest that loyalty is somewhat dangerous.

After: The text stops short of condemning loyalty outright, but it never lets a loyal character survive intact.

Why: one hedge is precision. Four is evasion. If you genuinely want to qualify, qualify with a specific limit rather than a pile of maybes.

7. NOMINALISATION AND DEAD OPENINGS

Before: There is a demonstration of the author's criticism of the institution in this scene.

After: This scene criticises the institution by letting its defenders speak uninterrupted.

Why: "there is", "it is", and nouns made out of verbs ("demonstration", "utilisation", "representation") add words and remove action. Find the real verb and let it work.

8. QUOTE DUMPING

Before: "He said that he had always believed the family would stay together no matter what happened to them, even in the worst of times." This quote shows he is loyal.

After: His belief that the family would hold "no matter what" is stated as fact, not hope, and the text never gives him reason to revise it.

Why: long quotations spend your word count on someone else's writing. Three or four words, chosen precisely, prove closer reading than a whole sentence copied out. Under exam conditions, short quotations are also far easier to recall accurately.

9. ORPHAN "THIS"

Before: The narrator refuses to explain. This makes the reader uncertain.

After: The narrator refuses to explain. This refusal makes the reader complicit in the guesswork.

Why: a bare "this" points backwards at everything and therefore at nothing. Attaching a noun forces you to name what you are referring to, and the naming is usually where the analysis appears.

10. TREATING CHARACTERS AS PEOPLE

Before: The reader feels sorry for her because she is a nice person who does not deserve what happens.

After: The text gives her the only unguarded interior voice in the novel, so her losses register more sharply than anyone else's.

Why: characters are constructions. Moral verdicts on them are not analysis. Reader response is analysable only when you can point to the technique that produced it.

11. THE RESTATEMENT SENTENCE

Before: Therefore, as previously mentioned, it is evident that the author shows loyalty is dangerous, as stated above.

After: Loyalty here is not simply risky; it is the one danger the text refuses to label as one.

Why: "as previously mentioned" and "as stated above" tell the reader you are about to say something twice. If a point needs restating, restate it at a higher level of insight, or not at all.

12. THE THREE-IDEA SENTENCE

Before: The author uses imagery of coldness which shows the family is distant and this also links to the theme of isolation which is important because the setting is in winter and reflects their emotions.

After: The cold is not atmosphere; it is diagnosis. Winter arrives in the text only after the family stops speaking, so the weather reads as consequence rather than setting.

Why: three ideas chained with "which" and "and this" means none of them gets analysed. Split, then decide which idea is actually yours. Usually one of the three was worth a paragraph and the other two were filler.

A FIVE-MINUTE SELF-EDIT THAT WORKS ON ANY ESSAY

Search your draft for six strings: "this shows", "uses", "very", "things", "in conclusion", "furthermore". Every hit is a candidate for one of the twelve repairs above. Most students find fifteen to twenty hits in a 900-word essay, and fixing them raises the register of the whole piece without changing a single idea.

The redraft checklist

Redrafting badly means starting at sentence one and fixing commas until you get bored.

Redrafting well means fixing the expensive problems first, because a beautiful sentence inside a paragraph that does not belong is wasted effort.

Work in this order. The times below assume a practice essay of roughly 700 to 900 words — the suggested length for a Unit 3 analytical response — being redrafted at home with the text beside you.

#	WHAT TO FIX	HOW TO CHECK IT	TIME
1	Does it answer this prompt?	Read your introduction and the first sentence of every body paragraph, in order, ignoring everything else. If that sequence does not answer the actual question, no sentence-level work will save the essay.	4 min
2	Does the contention argue something?	Apply the disagreement test. If nobody could disagree, rewrite it before touching anything else.	4 min
3	Does the argument move?	Write each paragraph's claim in the margin in six words. If two of them say the same thing, merge them and use the space for the idea you left out.	5 min

#	WHAT TO FIX	HOW TO CHECK IT	TIME
4	Is there analysis in every paragraph, not just evidence?	Highlight every sentence that explains <i>how</i> a feature makes meaning. A paragraph with none is a paragraph of summary wearing a costume.	5 min
5	Is any paragraph running on one piece of evidence?	Add a second moment that complicates the first. This is the single highest-value addition available to most mid-range essays.	4 min
6	Do the paragraph joins carry logic?	Read the last sentence of each paragraph and the first sentence of the next as a pair. If the pair does not make sense alone, the join is decorative.	3 min
7	Sentence-level repairs.	Run the six-string search from the previous section. Fix the hits.	5 min
8	Quotation accuracy and integration.	Check every quotation against the text. Trim anything longer than a clause.	3 min
9	Proofreading.	Read the final paragraph aloud first, then the rest. You catch more when the order is unfamiliar.	2 min

That is about thirty-five minutes, and steps 1 to 3 are worth more than steps 4 to 9 combined. If you only have ten minutes, do the first three and stop.

The exam version

Under timed conditions there is no redraft. The exam gives you 15 minutes of reading time and three hours of writing time across three sections of 20 marks each, and VCAA publishes no per-section time allocation, so how you split those three hours is your decision to make and to rehearse. What you can build in is a two-minute check before you write and a two-minute check after.

Before writing (two minutes): circle the load-bearing word, name the assumption in the prompt, write your contention in the margin, and list your three paragraph claims as six-word phrases. If claim two repeats claim one, change it now. Two minutes here saves you from the essay that discovers its argument in the final paragraph.

After writing (two minutes): reread your introduction against your conclusion. If they say exactly the same thing, add one clause to the conclusion that your body paragraphs earned. Then check that every paragraph's opening sentence still matches what that paragraph ended up arguing, because paragraphs drift while you write them, and a topic sentence that no longer fits is the cheapest mark you will ever lose.

WHAT TO PRACTISE BETWEEN NOW AND THE EXAM

Do not write full essays every time. Write ten contentions for ten different prompts on the same text and mark them against the disagreement test. Write single paragraphs and check them against the five moves. Take one paragraph you wrote in Term 1 and apply all twelve sentence repairs. Isolated practice on the part you are worst at will improve your essays faster than another timed full-length attempt, because a full essay lets you keep practising the things you can already do.

Keep going.

This guide is one piece of it. The VCE English hub on ATARMAxxing has 20 full practice exams with mark-by-mark answer guides, 20 sets of revision notes, practice questions and flashcards — all written to the study design.

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