

VCE English Text Response Mini-Guide

Step 1: Approaching a Text Response Essay

A key strategy in starting off Text Response on the right foot is being able to expect a certain type of essay prompt to be presented to you. Generally, there are 5 types of essay prompts you should watch out for:

Example for Frankenstein (*Mary Shelley*):

1. Theme-based essay prompt

The novel Frankenstein demonstrates that human nature should not be tampered with. Discuss.

2. Character-based essay prompt

Victor's downfall comes mostly from his inability to love. Discuss.

3. How-based essay prompt

How does Shelley explore the idea of isolation in the novel Frankenstein?

4. Literary device-based essay prompt

How does Shelley's framed narrative aid the understanding of the story of Frankenstein?

5. Quote-based essay prompt

"...Its gigantic structure, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity...". Frankenstein is about what it means to be human. Discuss.

The same 5 types of essay prompts can be applied to any text, see another example for Medea (*Euripides*):

1. Theme-based essay prompt

"Despite the age of the play, *Medea* still speaks to us today because it deals with universal truths about human nature". Discuss.

2. Character-based essay prompt

"She is no ordinary woman; no one making an enemy of her will win an easy victory, take it from me." *Medea* is the ultimate representation of feminism. Discuss.

3. How-based essay prompt

'The Chorus represents ordinary people with ordinary emotions, torn between sympathy and terror.' How does the Chorus influence our response to Medea and her actions?

4. Literary device-based essay prompt

'The Chorus represents ordinary people with ordinary emotions, torn between sympathy and terror.' How does the Chorus influence our response to Medea and her actions?

Note: As you can see, the 'literary device-based' essay prompt also overlaps the 'how-based' essay prompt. Be aware that essay prompt types may overlap one another and thus, can affect how you approach your Text Response essay.

5. Quote-based essay prompt

Medea deserves the title of 'abomination...most detested...by the whole human race!' Do you agree?

Knowing what type of essay prompt you are faced with will shape your response:

Type of essay prompt	Essay response
Theme-based essay prompt	Paragraphs should be centred around themes .
Character-based essay prompt	Paragraphs based around characters are limiting, especially since you usually only have three body paragraphs – therefore you'll only get the chance to speak about three characters. If the essay prompt only focuses on one character, this does not mean you should focus on only one character. Instead, remember every story has an ensemble cast – you would not understand the protagonist as well if you didn't have an antagonist and vice versa. Each character offers a new meaning to the overall story. Therefore, in order to provide a clear portrayal of the main character in question, you still need to speak about other characters.

	<p>Just like a theme-based essay prompt, paragraphs should still be centred around themes while using characters as examples to explore those themes.</p>
<p>How-based essay prompt</p>	<p>A 'how' question asks you: by what means is X achieved? This does not necessarily mean that you approach your essay with an agree or disagree contention as you might with theme-based or character-based essay prompts. Don't fall into that trap!</p>
<p>Literary device-based essay prompt</p>	<p>Focus on offering analysis on the author's writing style (also known as metalanguage). Types of metalanguage you may use in your body paragraphs include symbols, metaphors, imagery, frame story, first-person perspective and more!</p> <p>Become an expert in Metalanguage by reading our blog on: What Is Metalanguage? http://bit.ly/whatismetlanguage</p>
<p>Quote-based essay prompt</p>	<p>Do not ignore the quote. It is also not enough to throw it into an introduction or conclusion without further explanation. The best method is to ensure that you incorporate your quote into a body paragraph and do your best to expand and analyse the quote. This shows insight on your behalf because you acknowledge that the quote plays a major part of the prompt.</p>

Step 2: Breaking down the prompt/writing a kick-ass plan

Always adopt a strategic **method** when approaching a topic. This prevents you from panicking in a SAC or an exam while also allowing you to **save time**. Below is a step-by-step approach to breaking down your prompt clearly and efficiently (using a sample prompt on All About Eve (Joseph Mankiewicz):

'All About Eve' suggests that female power is temporary and short lived. Do you agree?

1. Highlight key words.

'All About Eve' suggests that **female power** is **temporary** and **short lived**. Do you agree?

2. Write down synonyms for these key words.

This will assist your vocabulary throughout the essay and ensure you are not simply re-writing the topic as your contention ... use these words!

Keyword	Synonym
Female power	feminine strength, empowerment, autonomy, independence, self-reliance
Temporary/Short lived	fleeting, momentary, short-term, brief, limited, volatile, transient, finite

Note: Finding antonyms (or words with opposite meanings) can be very helpful. Using opposite examples can solidify our understanding of an idea. For example: in this essay, we could explore a female who is independent and strong. If we wished to highlight this idea, we could compare the strong female with another character who is weak and dependent.

Keyword	Antonyms
Female power	Weakness, dependency
Temporary/Short lived	Permanent, enduring, long-lasting

3. Write your contention.

Sample Contention: In All About Eve, Mankiewicz emphasizes the limited nature of feminine strength – starkly contrasting the enduring independence of males in 1950's America.

This is your main argument. It should respond directly to your essay topic. If you aren't happy with it or are unsure, leave it and re-write after step 4!

ALWAYS consider all keywords. Do not cheat yourself out of a great mark because you 'know' more about one keyword, and therefore focus your entire essay on that keyword.

Remember that your argument needs to attack **Every. Single. Keyword.**

TIP! Be familiar with your question tags.

Question tags are the tail-end of essay prompts including:

- Do you agree?
- To what extent?
- Discuss.

Make sure you take time to consider these essay prompt extensions. How will it affect your response?

4. Note down 3-4 key arguments (body paragraphs).

Main theme-based arguments:

<i>Body paragraph 1</i>	<i>Female Autonomy</i>
<i>Body paragraph 2</i>	<i>Marriage</i>
<i>Body paragraph 3</i>	<i>Sacrificing career</i>

These will form the basis of your body paragraphs (ensure these are based on themes of the text).

Keep in mind that your contention, your key arguments and your evidence are all 'gears' created by your essay, designed to **work together** and respond to your essay topic. There should be no evidence or arguments in your essay that are

irrelevant to your essay topic ... otherwise you are missing the main task of text response!

5. Start writing your essay!

Introduction

1. Brief background to the text
2. Your contention
3. Your main arguments signposted

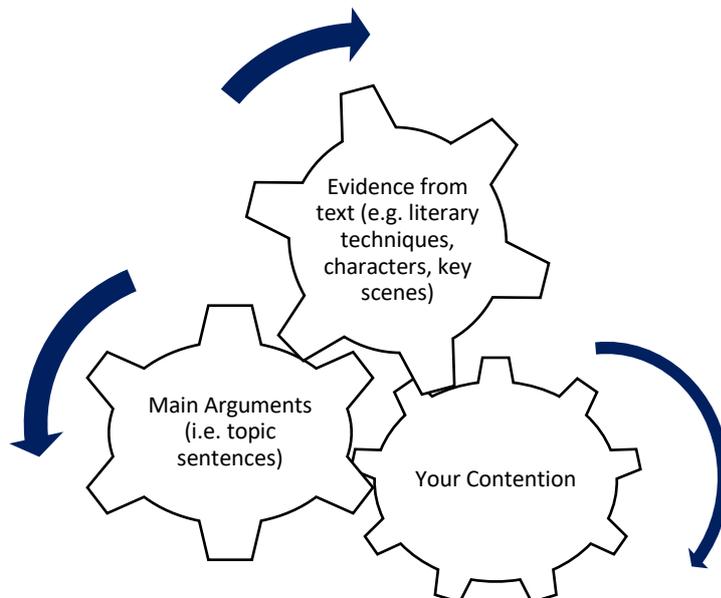
The examiner should be able to clearly identify these 3 elements.

Body Paragraphs (3-4)

1. Topic Sentence
2. Evidence supporting your topic sentence
3. Explanation of your evidence
4. A link back to your main argument and therefore to your contention.

Conclusion

1. Reiterate your contention
2. Restate key arguments (but don't just simply copy your introduction/topic sentences, they should be restated in a clear, succinct and to the point manner ... you have already just 'proven' them in your essay!)



If you follow a method every single time you approach an essay topic, no doubt you will become more efficient and more familiar with Text Response!

However, keep in mind that there is no 'right' method - everyone works differently so you are definitely able to personalise the steps above!

Step 3: Writing your fool-proof essay

Below is a brief break down of an essay structure:

Sample Introduction - Medea

Written in 431 BC during the pinnacle of Ancient Greece [**brief background**], one of the great Athenian playwrights Euripides utilizes the play Medea to convey the double-edged nature and flaws of Greek ideological imperatives [**contention**]. This is perpetuated by the protagonist Medea- whose embodiment of Homeric and Sophoclean values of a Greek hero causes for her to be the true victim in the cautionary tale. Subsequent to the heinous acts of revenge committed by the notoriously extremist character, she is left child less, husband less, and must bare the eternal guilt as a consequence. Superficially, Medea is suggested to be a typical woman “embittered by jealousy.” Yet the passion she elicits towards honour, reputation, and the notion of justice unravels an archetype of the Greek hero [**signposting arguments**]. By the end of the play, it is these Homeric virtues, which motivate her superfluous actions- thereby emphasizing the flaws of these ideals whilst suggesting her status as the true victim of the play. [**restating contention**]

Sample Body Paragraph – All About Eve

The portrayal of married characters promotes the mainstream views of the 1950s in which marriage would end the woes of all women [**topic sentence**]. In many instances throughout the film, marriage acts as the remedy to the struggles in a woman’s life. Margo Channing, the ‘star’ of the theatre battles with her aging self and fading career [**brief context & introduction of evidence**]. The leading motif of the mirror allows Mankiewicz to accentuate Margo’s obsession with her appearance. As the characters converse following Margo’s performance of ‘Footsteps on the Ceiling,’ Margo’s dressing table and mirror act as either the centerpiece or backdrop to the conversation. What the mirror represents is the image of the perfect self that Margo is unable to let go; an image that causes anguish and torment as her younger understudy slowly usurps her. In contrast to the scenes where Margo obsesses over her appearance, Mankiewicz completely alters Margo’s appearance and attitude in the Cub Room – where she announces her engagement to Bill. The bags underneath her eyes from Bill’s party completely disappear, and the lighting accentuates her youthfulness. [**evidence & explanation of evidence**] Following the perspective of the 1950s audience, Margo’s announcement of her marriage to Bill it what frees her from her insecurities - her matrimony saving her from her aging self. [**link to main argument**]

Sample Conclusion - Medea

Through the play, Euripides implies the ambivalence of virtues which played foundation for their society. **[contention]** Whilst Medea upholds the essence of honour and justice, her identity sees the challenging of these values, and her grim resolve in the name of the Gods and her virtues, sees the agony she ultimately suffers. Medea then, turns from “poor woman” to “lioness.” A lioness, without a husband, children, and with eternal guilt as she “disappears from view, taking the bodies of her children.” Such sufferings and imperative beliefs, causing for her, the “contemptible creature,” to be the true victim of the play- buy the hands of Greek ideals causing her extremist actions. **[restatement of key arguments]**

Extra Tips from VCE English 45+ study scorers

Do I just have to write HEAPS of essays to become better?

NO! Of course, the more practise the better. However, you can always break down the parts of an essay, practise **your method** of completing those tasks and put it all together when you write an essay! Here are **three simple tasks** other than writing an essay to help you succeed in text response:

1. **Practise topic sentences based on themes:** for every theme, complete a brainstorm and then write down as many topic sentences (arguments) as you can based on that theme *[estimated time to complete: 10 mins/theme]*
2. **Practise detailed plans for essays:** if you receive heaps of topics from school and you just know you can't complete an essay for them all before your SAC, don't let any of them go to waste! Instead, spend some time to make detailed plans for them to expose yourself to new ideas and practise formulating arguments and contentions! *[estimated time to complete: 15 mins/ essay topic]*
3. **Re-watch/re-read key scenes and discuss and argue your analysis of those scenes (what you think it means) with your friends:** the better you can explain your arguments to others, the better you can write them!
[estimated time to complete: 10 mins/ key scene]

Good luck!