HSC CRASH COURSE:
HOW TO GET A BAND 6 IN HSC ENGLISH CREATIVE WRITING

By Elizabeth Goh
About Art of Smart Education

Art of Smart Education (AOS) is an award winning provider of 1 on 1 tutoring and mentoring for students in Years K-12, delivered in the comfort of your own home.

We provide a proven holistic approach to helping students excel academically at school - our team of passionate tutors teach students the syllabus for school, as well as mentoring students, equipping them with proven study & life skills based on 8 years of research we've conducted with Australia's top students.

This way we provide students and parents with the best of both worlds - personalised 1 on 1 tutoring at home, combined with proven support and resources.

Over the past 6 years we've helped more than 2,500 students achieve an average mark improvement of 19.41%, we've won 11 business awards for excellence and we've been featured on the ABC, SBS, Sun Herald, Daily Telegraph, Perth Times and more!

HSC Creative Writing Crash Course

Struggling to write a Band 6 creative writing story on ‘discovery’ for HSC English?

We can help!

We've developed a personalised HSC English Creative Writing Crash Course where our team of expert tutors & coaches work with you 1 on 1 at your home to help you craft a Band 6 creative writing piece!

Find out more here or get in touch with us via email at info@artofsmart.com.au or give us a call on 1300 267 888 to get started!
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Chapter 1: What is ‘Discovery’ for HSC English?

Start with the Syllabus

Everything in the HSC - not just English - is developed upon principles of ‘key competencies’ - essentially skills that you develop as a result of the curriculum. Each section of your HSC English Paper expresses what skill is being assessed.

The Board of Studies pretty much gives you all the different kinds of Discovery that you should know for your prescribed texts.

Here’s what the syllabus tells you about Discovery

To help you make sense of Discovery, we’ve broken up syllabus for you so that it answers a few basic questions:

What is Discovery?

Discovery can encompass the experience of discovering something for the first time or rediscovering something that has been lost, forgotten or concealed.

How can you experience a Discovery?

Discoveries can be sudden and unexpected, or they can emerge from a process of deliberate and careful planning evoked by curiosity, necessity or wonder.

How can you react to a Discovery?

Discoveries can be fresh and intensely meaningful in ways that may be emotional, creative, intellectual, physical and spiritual. They can also be confronting and provocative.

What can making a Discovery do for you?

They can lead us to new worlds and values, stimulate new ideas, and enable us to speculate about future possibilities. Discoveries and discovering can offer new understandings and renewed perceptions of ourselves and others.

How can we relate to Discovery?

An individual's discoveries and their process of discovering can vary according to personal, cultural, historical and social contexts and values.

Who does Discovery affect?

The impact of these discoveries can be far-reaching and transformative for the individual and for broader society. Discoveries may be questioned or challenged when viewed from different perspectives and their worth may be reassessed over time. The ramifications of particular discoveries may differ for individuals and their worlds.

So what do you have to do?

You have to explore these in your creative writing, and you have to do it through using a stimulus.
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Chapter 2: How can I write about ‘Discovery’ for my HSC English Creative Writing Piece?

Still don’t quite get what ‘discovery’ is?

Read Episode 1 here where we use the HSC English Syllabus to break down exactly what ‘Discovery’ means.

Struggling to work out how to write creative piece using discovery?

We’ve used the syllabus to develop the following prompt questions for you to answer to help you start generating ideas for your creative writing piece!

What will your character discover in your story?

• Will it be something that your character is experiencing for the first time? What’s something that you experienced for the first time and found it to be unusual, surprising, painful, or memorable?
• Or will your character instead be rediscovering something that they had lost? What is something that you or a family member has lost in your life that has meant a lot?

How will your character experience discovery?

• Will it be a sudden and unexpected discovery? Have you experienced a discovery in your life that was sudden and surprised you?
• Or will it be a journey of slowly and deliberately discovering something? An investigation? Perhaps a slow realisation through a series of experiences or interactions with the world around you?

How will your character react to the discovery?

• Is the discovery confronting and provocative? Have you made a discovery that confronted you in your life? What was it? Can you use this for inspiration?
• Does it cause your character to breakdown and cry? When have you cried or broken down? Was it because you discovered something? Can you use this for inspiration for your writing?
• Or does it cause your character to celebrate? Is it a positive discovery that brings relief and joy?

What will making the discovery mean for your character?

• Will the discovery lead your character to discovery a new world?
• Will the discovery lead your character to change their beliefs or accept a different idea? When have you changed your mind about something? Why did you change your mind?

What context will your discovery and story be set in?

• Is your character living in 2015? Or is it in the future sometime?
• Is your character in Bathurst, Australia in 2004?
• Or is your character in England in 1890's?
Does the discovery impact on anyone else?

- Does the discovery impact on anyone other than your main character? Does it impact on their family or friends? How?
- Have you discovered something that’s impact your family or a close friend? What was it? How did it impact them?

By answering these simple questions above, aligned to the syllabus you’ll be able to generate lots of great ideas you can begin to use as inspiration for your creative writing piece!

Still need help developing a creative writing idea on ‘discovery’?

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Chapter 3: How to Develop your Character for your HSC English Creative Writing Piece

Consider storytelling to be like a jigsaw puzzle, with the pieces being Characters, Plot, Setting and Voice. All together, they create a story. Lack in one and you lack a complete picture. Even though you have less than an hour to create your creative, you will need to ensure that you give a full picture.

Write about what you know

I sat down with a student one day to do some work on her creative.

Summarised, her short story was about a girl named Tayla who was a slave in 1950’s England.

After reading her creative, I asked her a few short questions:

- How common is the name ‘Tayla’ in 1950’s England?
- Did slavery exist in 1950’s England?
- What was happening in the world in the 1950’s?

We soon established that she didn’t know much about being a girl named Tayla who was a slave in 1950’s England.

When approaching your creative, keep one thing in mind: write about what you know. However, this doesn’t mean you’re restricted to writing about the school yard, nor does it prevent you from writing a world more elaborate than The Hobbit.

Good writers do their homework, especially when writing historical novels. Why do they do it? To ensure that they capture everything as it would have been back then - for believability’s sake.

Start with developing your character

A great character does not necessarily mean a loveable or likeable character.

Memorable characters always have two qualities.

1. The first is that they have strength in who they are and what makes them… them! This can be through their values or characteristics or individuality.
2. The second is that they develop or change as a result of the narrative.

Let’s have a look at a few different characters.

Characteristics

Steve Rogers/Captain America from Captain America: The First Avenger (film)

Steve Rogers starts off as a sickly young man from Brooklyn. However, what makes him the perfect candidate for Captain America is that he personifies stereotypical World War II values of heroism, courage and patriotism. Despite his small stature and poor health, these values drive him to make multiple attempts to sign up to become a soldier for the Allies in World War II.
Briony Tallis from Atonement (2001 novel)

At the beginning of Atonement, Briony Tallis is a 13-year-old girl from a wealthy English family who witnesses the sexual tension between her sister, Cecilia, and a servant’s son, Robbie. As she grows older, she retains some of her characteristic traits.

Character Development

Jason Brody from Far Cry 3 (2013 video game)

According to the developers of Far Cry 3, Jason Brody was not designed to be likeable; he was designed to change.

At the beginning of Far Cry 3, Jason is ordinary; he’s immature, unconfident, childish and naive, to the point of being referred to as a ‘SoCal douchebag’ in Far Cry 4. When he is captured by pirates with his older brother, Grant, Jason freaks out when his brother kills a pirate so that his cover is not blown. The events of the video game force him to change into a disturbed, violent and unstable killer who laughs to Ride of the Valkyries as he shoots a machine gun into an airfield of pirates.

Though Jason has been dubbed ‘unlikeable’, he changes rapidly through the video game from a naïve young man into a ruthless and psychopathic killer. Though he is not likeable, players experience a dramatic shift in values and personality as a result of his journey.

Hiccup from How To Train Your Dragon

Hiccup lives in the fictional town of Berk where there is an established stereotype of the men who live there: they’re gigantic warmongering Vikings. There is an immediate and established visual image; they’re large, brutal and imposing.

Our hero, Hiccup, is the classic opposite; he’s smaller, thinner and weaker, but he’s the son of the Chieftain who is a pacifist in comparison to his neighbours and friends in Berk. The careful selection of Jay Baruchel as the voice actor gave an unconfident and childish voice to Hiccup with space and time to grow, just as the character would as an immature teenager.

Creating your own character

The best way to think about your character is to interview them. Grab a pen and paper (or your laptop… whatever floats your boat!) and answer these questions:

1. What is your character’s name? Does the character have a nickname?
2. What is your character’s hair colour? Eye colour?
3. What kind of distinguishing facial features does your character have?
4. Does your character have a birthmark? Where is it? What about scars? How did they get them? Are they proud of them, or is it shameful or embarrassing to them?
5. What is their biggest fear? Who have them told this to? Who would they never tell this to? Why?
6. What is the one thing they love to do most in the world? Where everything else just stands still?
7. Do they have a secret?
8. What makes your character laugh out loud?
9. When has your character been in love? Had a broken heart?
10. Is your character or morning or a night person?

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Chapter 4: How to Develop your Setting for your HSC English Creative Writing Piece

Your character should be a product of your story’s context as it ensures believability.

What do I mean by this? Simply put your character needs to be consistent with the time period, setting and context that you’re portraying them in.

**Your character needs to be consistent with the context and setting**

For example, the British television show, The Hour, was based in London, 1956.

When dialogue between two characters contained the phrase, 'I’m your biggest fan!', language historians almost rioted (Yes, there are such things as language historians!)

Why?

The phrase ‘I’m your biggest fan!’ was not used back in the 1950s, and resultantly disrupts the flow of the story as it is historically incorrect. It makes the characters and story less believable.

Your setting and your characters should work alongside one another. They still may be different in the values they hold, but that is usually a product of their environment.

In Episode 3 we explored develop your character and used a couple of examples. Let’s have a look at these characters again for this episode

**Steve Rogers/Captain America from Captain America: The First Avenger (film)**

Living in the 1930s/1940s, Steve was very familiar with the whole idea of the ‘Nazi threat’. As a product from his time, he was imbued with a sense of duty and service, both which motivated him to join up to the Army.

In the Avengers timeline, Steve’s preservation in the ice for 70 years makes him dated; he still is ‘very 1940s’ in the way he approaches conversation and how he does not understand contemporary pop-culture references, (“I understood that reference!”) to the point of carrying around a notebook of things he needs to ‘catch up on’ (it includes Thai food, the Moon Landing and the band Nirvana).

**Jason Brody from Far Cry 3 (2013 video game)**

Far Cry 3 takes place is set in 2012 on a fictional tropical island called Rook Island, located somewhere in the Indian and Pacific Ocean. The island has native inhabitants with a distinct culture, but also violent and ruthless pirates.

Jason Brody is your typical slacker who went to college in Los Angeles and ended up doing a series of odd jobs here and there afterwards. As a bloke who likes to make the most of life and is a bit of a daredevil, it makes sense that he would go parachuting to a ‘deserted island’ for fun. His older brother, whom was in the military, was prepared to kill for survival and holds a ‘do or die’ attitude from the beginning. Jason, whom was not trained to do so, understandably freaks out.

Developing your setting for your character

As we explored in Episode 3, the best way to think about your character is to interview them.

Grab a pen and paper (or your laptop... whatever floats your boat!) and answer these questions to help you develop your setting:

1. Who are your character’s friends and family? Who do they surround themselves with?
2. Who are the people your character is closest to? Who do they wish they were closest to?
3. Where was your character born?
4. Where have they lived since they where born?
5. Where do they call home?
6. Where does your character go when their angry?
7. What time period is your character living in?
8. What type of clothes do they wear?
9. What does your character do for work?
10. What is the weather like where your character lives?

From here, you can start to have a good think about your character and what they’d be like if you met them in real life. Getting into their frame of mind is the best way to curate their point of view.

Still need help developing your setting?

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Chapter 5: Selecting the Point of View and Voice for your HSC English Creative Writing Piece

Every narrative has a point of view from which the story is told. The point of view helps to orient the reader into seeing the world in a particular way - through *their* eyes, *your* eyes or *our* eyes.

**Pick one of these 3 points of views**

You will most likely use one of three points of view:

**First Person**
- **Example**: My journey to the shops was made much less enjoyable by the sweltering heat. I was feeling light-headed and faint.
- **Pros**: Better insight into the experience of the protagonist, places the reader in the story;
- **Cons**: The story is limited by seeing only the experience of the protagonist;

**Second Person**
- **Example**: Your journey to the shops was made much less enjoyable by the sweltering heat which forced you to become light-headed and faint.
- **Pros**: It places the reader in the story to a degree, makes the reader feel like they are being spoken to personally
- **Cons**: The story is limited to seeing the experience of the protagonist, the reader feels like they are being told what to do and can be considered clunky

**Third Person**
- **Example**: Jennifer’s journey to the shops was made much less enjoyable by the sweltering heat which forced her to become light-headed and faint.
- **Pros**: Better insight into the broader characters beyond your protagonist, enables you to go into greater depth around character portrayal
- **Cons**: It feels less personal for the reader as they are not in the story themselves

How you write your point of view will affect how intimate your story is: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald gives you an almost voyeuristic view of Nick Carraway’s observations of Jay Gatsby’s world, whilst the *Harry Potter* series allows us to view the journey of all of the characters and all of their insights upon a general level.

**Which point of view are you going to use for your HSC English Creative Writing piece?**

**Find your voice for your character**

Every writer has a different voice, and everything you write should sound distinctly like you. Good writers have a very distinct style of writing which only they can craft themselves through things like punctuation, character development and dialogue.

When I was at school, my teacher always said that my writing was ‘prose poetry’: when read aloud, the sentences would roll off your tongue, but was peppered with seemingly small and meaningless statements.
Developing your voice comes with practice - but a great way to get started is to follow these steps:

1. Is there a character in a movie or a book that you think your character is similar to? If so re-read or watch a part of the movie or book. Take notes on how the character speaks.
2. Using your notes, practice writing a couple of sentences with your own character capturing a similar voice.

Still need help developing your character’s point of view and voice?
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Chapter 6: Developing your Story Idea for your HSC English Creative Writing Piece

Most traditional narratives have a plot, or **events that make a story**.

In grade school, they probably taught you that a plot should look something like this:

**Orientation** → **Complication** → **Climax** → **Resolution**

Though you can use it, it is very linear, and makes for a rather plain story. This is why most Hollywood films have adopted Gustav Freytag’s theory of dramatic narrative structure or in it’s simplest form, the ‘Five Point Plot Breakdown’.

These are the five most relevant causal events in a story and it looks a bit like this:

**Inciting Incident** → **Rising Action** → **Conflict** → **Climax** → **Resolution**

Why does Hollywood keep on using it? Because it’s interesting!

**Developing your Story Idea - Use the 5 Point Plot Breakdown**

**The Orientation, or the ‘Inciting Incident’**

Every story has to start somewhere to ‘orient’ the reader. This will often establish the protagonist and the setting, and will sometimes present the hints of the crisis, dilemma or problem which the protagonist is likely to encounter, and will be a departure from everyday life for the protagonist.

*Answer these questions:*

- What is your inciting incident?
- What is the problem they are facing?

**The Rising Action, or the ‘Lock In’**

After the protagonist and the setting are established, the crisis typically presents a challenging predicament for the protagonist which will create the main tension of the story.

*Answer these questions:*

- How does the initial incident result in a bigger problem?
- How does this create tension for your character?

**The Conflict, or the ‘First Culmination’**

This is the point of the narrative where the protagonist experiences their first challenge in the crisis, testing their initial capability. In most Hollywood films, this is usually the first setback.
Answer these questions:

- What challenge does your character experience in trying to solve the problem?
- How will they fail? What future additional problem and tension will this cause?

**The Climax, or the ‘Main Culmination’**

This is the main test of the protagonist in the crisis. To keep this interesting, this is also the point where protagonist may look like they are going to fail. This is usually the point which allows the protagonist to define who they are as a person, and includes definition of their values or beliefs.

Answer these questions:

- What is the big final challenge your character faces and needed to overcome?
- What values or beliefs (relating to discovery) do you want them to portray?

**The Resolution, or the ‘Third Act Twist’**

The resolution usually starts where the antagonist or the crisis has taken the upper hand and the protagonist is doomed to failure. This is usually where the turn of events has occurred, the crisis has been resolved and the protagonist has come out victorious, but has been changed or transformed as a result of their experience.

Answer these questions:

- Does your character actual succeed or do they fail?
- What have they learned from the experience? (Hint - this where you can link to Discovery!)

Here’s how *Captain America: The First Avenger* fits into this framework:

**The Orientation, or the ‘Inciting Incident’**

Steve Rogers is a Brooklyn kid who suffers from poor health, but still wants to serve his country in World War II. He lies about his health each time but still gets rejected. However, impressed by his unyielding patriotism and sense of duty, Dr. Abraham Erskine accepts his latest application.

**The Rising Action, or the ‘Lock In’**

Steve isn’t the strongest or fastest, but is the smartest from his cohort. Because of this, Dr Erskine puts him forward for a new experiment to turn him into a super soldier. After Steve accepts this, Steve is injected with the Super Soldier Serum which makes him a foot taller and completely built with muscle.

**The Conflict, or the ‘First Culmination’**

Despite the Serum, Steve is used to encourage enlistment in the army through display shows. Steve hears that an Allied regiment containing his best friend, Bucky Barnes, is to be abandoned behind enemy lines. Sick of being a show pony, Steve decides to parachute behind enemy lines. Steve busts Bucky and the Allies out from the Hydra plant where they are imprisoned. The antagonist, Red Skull of Hydra, escapes before being killed.
The Climax, or the ‘Main Culmination’

After committing a series of attacks on Hydra, Steve and his Allied team mates attack a train and capture Red Skull’s right-hand man, Dr Armin Zola. However, in capturing Dr Zola, Bucky is shot and falls to his death whilst Steve looks on helplessly, unable to save him.

The Resolution, or the ‘Third Act Twist’

Vowing revenge on Red Skull, Steve tracks him down on an aircraft. He catches up to him, but finds that the aircraft is loaded with bombs with the purpose of blowing up New York City. Steve decides to sacrifice himself and plunge the plane into the ocean to prevent the massive loss of life that the explosion would cause.

See what I mean?

That being said, you’re not exactly writing a Hollywood blockbuster; you are writing a story which has a plot which both believable (we’ve covered this in Episode 3 & 4) and relevant (check out Episode 7 more more on relevance!)

Your next task is figuring out how you want to write your narrative. Would you like to write a letter? A diary? A newspaper article?

If you’ve got no idea, be sure to read onto Episode 7 on Narrative Types!

Still need help developing your story idea?

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Chapter 7: How to Pick your Narrative Type for your HSC English Creative Writing Piece

Throughout all our Episodes we’ve referred to your HSC English Creative Writing as a ‘Piece’ - not a ‘short story’ and we’ve done this very consciously.

Why?

While your creative writing piece needs to express a story in that there is some form of narrative arc, and because it’s limited to 40 minutes of time in an exam it’s also going to be short, it doesn’t mean however that your narrative type and form necessarily has to be a typical ‘short story’. In fact, past HSC exam papers refer to it as ‘imaginative writing’.

Your writing a Creative Piece, not just a Short Story

In fact, you could choose to express your creative writing piece in a different narrative type and form and in fact we recommend it if you want to stand out from the crowd!

Here’s some different narrative types (beyond the short story) that you can use. Note, you may even include these as components within a short story form.

Monologue

If you’ve ever studied Shakespeare, you’ll probably have come across a monologue. A monologue is a train of thought or stream of consciousness of a character, often spoken in the first person.

I never did like Michael. He’s brutish and immature and is hardly agreeable whenever we chance upon the topics of politics and religion. Perhaps it’s because of his wife, like she’s stuck in the 1800s or something.

Letter

Letters are probably a little outdated nowadays with Facebook and email, but it carries the same essence; it is a written message from one to another and depends heavily upon the relationship between the two parties. A letter is written with a very specific reader in mind, and displays the relationship between these parties.

To Family Members

Letters to family members or friends should sound like a real conversation between the two parties, is a little more conversational and occasionally address the intended reader by name. They will also use more contracted words, and be discreet or purposeful in the selection of words used.

Oh, and Roger, you’ll be happy to hear that I got the role!

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Formal Letters

Formal letters have a purpose for writing: whether it’s for business or enrich relationships, formal letters are often curated by their purpose. Firstly, they address the individual, their residence and the date. Formal letters often emphasise key words and ideas, and use formal language, and make specific statements.

Dear Mr Graham, I write to you to inform you of the passing of my dearest Mother.

Diary

Most diaries have since been replaced by blogs or online journals, even Facebook posts. They are private and discrete entries which are arranged by date and report or record events over a period of time. Diaries may include the diarist’s experiences, eye-witness accounts, thoughts and feelings, and include comments or commentary outside of the experience.

Diaries are typically written to be read only by the diarist, and as such, are much more intimate and truthful. However, some are written with the anticipation that it will be read, and as such, be limited in its self-expression. Diaries are not always exciting, and can be used for personal reasons, such as recording budgets or personal notes.

The day Theodore Roosevelt lost his wife, he wrote a simple note in the simplest and most beautiful way.

“The light has gone out of my life”

Autobiography

Autobiographies are written by those who typically know the person the best; the individual themselves. It is a written account of the life and times of that person, and is often read as a story. They are often written based solely on memory, and are often ‘cathartic’, or therapeutic.

Autobiographies are often extremely subjective. In controversial situations, autobiographies have been used to justify the ideologies or actions of an individual, or are an attempt to recreate or ‘rewrite’ history.

I consulted Roland as to whether or not this was the right decision to make. In mere minutes, he voiced to me the options; save the President, or to save the lives of those upon the ‘Queen Anne’.

I deliberated, and it was my sense of the greater good - to save the lives of the many over the lives of the few - which drove me to deliver aid to those upon the ‘Queen Anne’.

Memoir

Memoirs are often used as a reflection upon one’s own life, but is not an eye-witness account. In fact, memoirs often have the writer as being an observer of one’s own life, which has been enriched not only by hindsight but by substantial background information which was not available at the time of the actual event. Memoirs will often also contain commentary as well.

Keep in mind that memoirs often reflect vital or important events, whilst autobiographies focus upon the life and times of a whole person.

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At the time, I believed this was the choicest decision. To me, the ‘greater good’ was to save the lives of hundreds, rather than save the life of the President. How was I to know that the Government would fall into disarray?

Still need help in selecting your narrative type?

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Chapter 8: Making Your HSC English Creative Writing Piece Relevant for ‘Discovery’

In Episode 1 we explored exactly what ‘Discovery’ is all about using the HSC English Syllabus - if you’ve forgotten, check it out here.

While we’ve been focusing on how to write a great creative piece at the end of the day, it still needs to be about Discovery for you to get the marks and crack that Band 6.

How do you make your creative piece relevant for Discovery?

You may love alternate history. Epics. Adventures. Intense emotion. You might want to know what would have happened if Germany had won World War II.

But the question you’ve got to then ask yourself is:

‘But how can I portray Discovery in 40 minutes?’

As much as you may really want to explore all these things, they may be implausible for your Paper 1 creative.

When you write, you need to think about two essential things:

1) For whom am I writing?
2) Why am I writing it?

The answers? Let's be really honest here:

1) The HSC Examiners;
2) To ‘express understanding of Discovery in the context of your studies’. Or to put it simply, because you have to write a creative which explores the concept of Discovery.

If you’re a keen writer, chances are you’ve got a thousand ideas whirling around your noggin and you’ve got no idea where to start. Or you’re on the other side, where you’ve got no ideas and no idea where to start.

Refer to the Syllabus

I want you to read the following three points:

- [Discovery can be] Rediscovering something that has been… forgotten;
- The impact of these discoveries can be far-reaching and transformative for the individual;
- [Discoveries can offer] Renewed perceptions of ourselves.

Let's make those into questions.

- What has been forgotten, and how has it been rediscovered?
- How has the Discovery of the forgotten been transformative for the individual?
- How has the transformation as a result of rediscovering the forgotten renewed the self-perception of the individual?
Let’s create a protagonist, and give them a setting and a point of view.

Jessica is a young girl who has recently moved to a new suburb and new school. She tries very hard to fit in with her new friends but finds that their ‘group’ is very well established due to years of friendship. Before she moved, she loved to play video games, and specifically the video game *Team Fortress 2* where she has many friends online as she spends many hours playing alongside them. However, her new house hasn’t been equipped with internet so she hasn’t been able to play recently. She finds school stressful and upsetting as opposed to enjoyable. Her parents nag her to have friends ‘in real life’, rather than online as they ‘aren’t her real friends’.

Now let’s answer the questions using the protagonist, setting and point of view.

**What has been forgotten?**

Jessica has forgotten what real friendship feels like since she has not been able to play *Team Fortress 2* as she regularly sees her ‘in real life’ friends hanging out together (according to Facebook) without inviting her, even though she tries very hard to make friends. She arrives home one day to find that she has internet once more, and so she instantly logs online to play. As soon as she logs on, she is flooded with greetings from her team mates asking where she was and that they were worried about her.

**How has the Discovery of the forgotten been transformative for the individual?**

When she logs on to all this care and concern, Jessica realises that her real friends are the ones she has online as they care for her very deeply even though she does not see them in the offline world. She rediscovers what friendship is truly about.

**How has the transformation as a result of rediscovering the forgotten renewed the self-perception of the individual?**

Jessica no longer feels pressured to try and fit in with her friends at school, and no longer feels lonely as she realises that her ‘in real life’ friends aren’t true friends, but the ones online are her ‘true’ friends. She decides then that she doesn’t need to try and be friends with her friends at school as she will ‘see’ her online friends everyday just like she would at school.

**Now what do we have?**

A basis for our creative writing piece. Although it doesn’t have much of a plot yet (we will get to that later!), what we do have is a piece which is going to be relevant to the audience for which we are writing and a piece which is answers why we are writing.

Now that I’ve given her the circumstances, why don’t we have a look at how we can create a story with a plot for Jessica.

**The Orientation, or the ‘Inciting Incident’**

Jessica plays one last game of *Team Fortress 2* before she moves to a new town, and new school where her cousin is in the same grade. The moving truck is late and so she doesn’t have her computer, or any internet to play *Team Fortress 2* for a while. She gets a text from one of her *Team Fortress 2* team mates the evening before going to school, wishing her good luck at her new school.

**The Rising Action, or the ‘Lock In’**

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Jessica gets introduced to her cousin’s friends, expecting to make friends with them. However, it is established that they aren’t very welcoming of her, especially when she mentions that most of her friends are people she’s never met in real life – her online *Team Fortress 2* team.

**The Conflict, or the ‘First Culmination’**

It is Jessica’s birthday on Friday and she arranges to go to the mall with her new school friends to have a small celebration. However, throughout the day, each one of her school friends comes to her with an excuse as to why they can’t hang out that afternoon, but wish her a happy birthday anyhow.

**The Climax, or the ‘Main Culmination’**

She gets home and her parents ask why she’s not out at the mall with her ‘real life friends’ and she says that her friends were all busy but mentions that all of her *Team Fortress 2* clan mates texted her ‘happy birthday’ in the morning. However, she refreshes Facebook and finds all her school friends are all tagged in at a bar instead. Jessica tries to distract herself but she continues to see updates of her friends at the bar, exacerbating her loneliness. The next morning the moving truck arrives.

**The Resolution, or the ‘Third Act Twist’**

Jessica sets up her computer and the internet. As soon as she logs into Steam, one of her teammates, Jack, automatically messages her asking how she is and how things are, followed by an instant invitation into a game of *Team Fortress 2*. As they open up a call, all of her online friends show her genuine love and concern. They then introduce her to a new guy who wants to join their team but has never played a Soldier on the team before and that they would teach him how. Jessica says that that was how she joined the team. She gets a call on her iPhone from one of her school friends. She decides not to pick it up; she’s with her real friends now.

Even though Jessica’s story isn’t epic, it has a plot line. What’s more is that it addresses several different kinds of discovery.

Still need help making your creative writing relevant for Discovery?

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Chapter 9: How Edit & Proofread Your HSC Creative Writing

After spending hours writing (or trying to write and tearing your hair out) your draft of your creative writing piece it’s easy to believe that once you’ve got your draft completed that all the work is now done.

The reality is that if you’re aiming for a Band 6, it’s unlikely you’re going to hit the required level of sophistication on your first draft or potentially even by your 2nd or 3rd!

The key to taking that draft you’ve written and turning it into a Band 6 quality writing piece is to develop the skill of critiquing your own writing.

Why critique your own writing?

Critiquing your own writing first and foremost is fast. It can take time to your writing marked by a teacher or tutor so critiquing your work enables you to develop feedback fast and identify how to improve your writing.

Additionally, critiquing your own work is a brilliant way to develop your skills. Think about it - if you can critique your own work, it means you’re developing an understanding of what good and bad writing is and what the HSC markers are looking for. And this means you’re going to be able to write better!

Getting your draft marked by a teacher or tutor is still recommended (although we’d recommend starting with self-critiquing) as they can provide expert feedback from a pair of fresh eyes on how you could enhance your writing. Need expert feedback? Email us at info@artofsmart.com.au and we’ll match you with one of our expert HSC tutors to help you turn your draft into a Band 6!

Critiquing your writing begins with your use of language

Language is incredible.

If you really think about it, everything that we see in cinema, say to our friends and write when we fall in love all comes down to language and how words, when strung together in a particular form, can create meaning.
Read the following little snippet from Gary Provost aloud:

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen.
I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony.
I use short sentences.
And I use sentences of medium length.
And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.”

— Gary Provost

Pretty damned awesome, right? It's all through the control of language.

**Language control is the difference between good writing and bad writing!**

Though your ideas may be worthy of a Nobel Prize for Literature, if your language control is poor, then your brilliance will be wasted.

Take Twilight, for example. We're not saying it's a wonderful book (hint: it's awful), but it would have been marginally more bearable if it didn’t include sentences like…

"He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare."

Or…

"He was both dazzling and dazzled."

**Why is this an example of bad writing?**

In these two quotations, Stephanie Meyer is a little too generous with how many adjectives she includes in the sentences, detracting from focusing upon an idea.

George Orwell of the Animal Farm fame has as his second rule of writing, 'Never use a long word where a short one will do.'
In fact, when Faulkner criticised Hemingway of his perceived limited vocabulary, Hemingway threw back some major sass to him and said ‘Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words?’

Although Twilight will go down in history, it won’t be for literary excellence. The books selected as texts for the HSC are exemplar, and that is why they have been chosen for you to study.

**Critique Test Number 1: Read your story out aloud**

Just like we had you read the snippet from Gary Provost above out loud, pick up your creative writing piece right now and read it out aloud.

**Why?**

Reading out your work aloud is an easy yet powerful way to identify any parts of your work that need to be enhanced.

**As you’re reading your work, ask yourself:**

- Does this sound boring?
- Does it build suspense when I want it to?
- Does it build a sense of pace and action when I want it to?
- Does it slow down and mirror the feelings of my characters when I want it to?
- Do I stumble over any words or phrases?

Once you’ve identified the answers (and specific places) to the above questions, you’ve developed a list of parts of your work you can enhance.

Rinse and repeat!

**Critique Test Number 2: ‘Show! Don’t tell!’**

It’s a principle that every single teacher will tell you. What exactly does it mean? As writers, we want the reader to experience what is occurring, and we want to do this through senses, actions, thoughts and feelings rather than merely reporting what is occurring.

For example, compare the following two sentences:

1) Nicole was cold.
2) Nicole shivered. Her feet were numb inside her sodden boots.

In one, we know that Nicole was… cold. And that’s it. Although we know Nicole is cold, we don’t know anything else. Was she shivering? Was she wet? What kind of weather was she going through? What was she feeling? What was she thinking? These are all questions we can ask ourselves based on the second example.

We have allowed the reader to experience what Nicole is going through, without necessarily stating the obvious.

**Read your work out aloud again. As you do, circle, highlight or underline any places where you have told the reader something, but haven’t shown them as well.**
Use this is as your hit list for the parts of your writing piece you need to go over and enhance.

Rinse and repeat.

**Critique Test Number #3: Keep it short and simple**

In keeping George Orwell's second rule of writing, read over your draft creative writing piece.

**Circle, highlight or underline:**

- Any word that you’ve used that is long and could be replaced with a simpler, clearer word circle
- Any phrase where you have used (like Stephanie Myer from Twilight) 2 or more adjectives to describe something

Once you’ve done this, go back and replace the long words with simpler alternatives and remove some over generous adjectives.

Rinse and repeat.

**Critique Test Number #4: Less is more**

Essentially, less is more.

Let’s take a look at the snippet below.

“What happened?” Chris asked quietly as he stalked Marcus closely from the locker room with the beads of sweat plummeting from his forehead. He held the soccer ball under his arm tightly enough so that it would not slip away.

“Nothing.” Marcus’ voice was low and hushed as he began to think wildly in his imagination about his conversation with the aesthetically pleasing Michael. The air was cold as he stepped out of the dull, grey, boring locker room into the equally as dull grey and boring world around him. Another bloke was pumping iron to his right whilst five of the eleven treadmills were taken.

If we’re being quite brutal, all that’s happening is that Chris is walking out from the locker room when he asks Marcus what happened. Marcus then replies ‘nothing’. However, there is a lot of unnecessary material around this. Do we really need to know about how Chris is holding the soccer ball, or how many people are on the treadmills? Only if it is relevant. If not, it can go.

Writing is a brutal process. Whilst practicing your creative writing, ask yourself whether your piece could go without that sentence. If it can, get rid of it.

If you took a red pen to the paragraph above, this is what would be left.

“What happened?” Chris asked quietly as he stalked Marcus from the locker room.

“What happened?” Chris ask quietly as he stalked Marcus from the locker room.

“Nothing.” Marcus replied. His mind was still focused upon his conversation with Michael.

Now it’s your turn.
Read your story out aloud. As you do, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this sentence and the information contained within critical for my story?
- Does this sentence provide key information that is necessary to establish setting, narrative or develop my character?

As you go through, take a red pen to your work and cut anything that isn't critical for your story.

Rinse and repeat!

**Further Reading:**

George Orwell's 5 Rules of Writing

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Chapter 10: How to Adapt Your HSC English Creative Writing Piece to Exam Stimulus

So you’ve done all this work, and suddenly they throw the worst at you: a stimulus that has nothing to do with your Creative Piece.

Or so you thought.

Here in Episode 10, you will figure out how to adapt your piece to any stimulus they throw your way!

Take a moment to read the first part of my creative piece with Jessica...

Silence.
It was rare to hear silence at the Holmes household. Though only slight, laughter could always be heard from Jessica’s corner of the home. Laughter. Or yelling. The occasional cuss word. But mostly laughter.
And yet… it was silent.
Boxes were packed and stacked, the furniture was wrapped in canvas, and A Man and a Van was parked in the driveway.
A last message popped up upon Steam Messenger:

>> ARISoloeSupremacy: let us know when you get there so we know you’ll be safe!
A small smile crossed Jessica’s lips as she continued typing.
>> NuClassiq[Supremacy]: i wont have internet for a bit but as soon as i do ill be back !
>> NuClassiq[Supremacy]: :)

Keep this in mind as we explore how we can adapt this to any stimuli.

What kind of stimuli will they throw at you?

The first thing you will need to take into account is whether the stimulus is textual or visual, as the question will then ask you to use them in different ways.

TEXTUAL

This will come in the form of a quotation or a sentence. They will often be short statements ('Our journey starts from here.') or leading statements ('It could never be healed…').

You will not have much time, so you’ll need to do some quick textual analysis:

Is the given statement as obvious as it seems?
What are two interpretations of the statement?

Once you’ve got answers for the above, you can move onto the big question:

How does the stimulus link to Discovery in the syllabus? (Hint: head back to Episode 1!)
**VISUAL**
This can be anything from the cover for a novel to a photograph to an artwork.

Like the sentences, you will need to do some basic textual analysis:

- *What are three techniques being used, and what meaning do they give?*
- *What purpose, moral or idea does the image invoke?*

And again, once you’ve got these, you can move onto the big question:

- *How does the stimulus link to Discovery in the syllabus?*

**Link Your Creative Piece to the Syllabus**

Earlier in the Creative Crash Course, we asked you to investigate what areas of Discovery your creative piece discusses or explores.

From answering the questions above, you will have been able to identify where the stimulus links to Discovery.

The types of Discoveries which can be made according to the syllabus are not exclusive to one another: most of them overlap one another, and thus, if you discuss one, with some wrangling, you can discuss another. This might seem weird and convoluted, but it’s not!

For example, an individual’s process of discovery, whether personal, cultural or historical can be rediscovering a lost memory, culture or history, which also happens to be a personal discovery. Basically, this Venn Diagram…

With a common theme, you won’t need to change your story at all, but emphasise the shared idea between them!
Adapting to a Textual Stimulus

When you encounter textual stimuli, they will ask you to use it in one of two different ways:

- ‘Use as your first sentence’; or
- ‘Use as a central element’.

You will typically be offered three quotations or statements from which you get to choose one. The quotations will usually be very short, or will be leading sentences. This orients where your story should start.

SHORT QUOTATION/STATEMENT

Typically, short quotations or statements are used as the first sentence of a piece. The 2010 HSC gave ‘I am outside the door’ as a the first sentence of the creative piece. Bare in mind that you will not need to use this as is: you can change it slightly to suit your needs as we shall see below.

This particular statement puts me into a spot of bother. Why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY C/P</th>
<th>GIVEN STATEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>3rd - ‘Jessica’, ‘she’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Past - ‘Jessica was’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Omniscient Narrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But I don’t want to change how my creative piece is written!

Taking into account the fact that you have just managed to find a common ground for your creative, you again, will not need to change all of your creative piece, but alter how it starts. So, you’ll have to think a little creatively about how to use this first statement. You can use it…

- As speech: “I am outside the door.” The delivery driver yelled. A last message popped up on Steam Messenger.
- As a thought:
- As a commentary: ’I am outside the door. The one into the new part of my life.’ Jessica quickly deleted the text she had typed as a new message popped up in her conversation on Steam Messenger.

However, if you’re so inclined to change everything, then it can be…

- As an action: I am outside the door. This was my new home.

LEADING SENTENCES

Leading sentences are usually to be used as ‘central elements’. So what exactly does this mean? It means that your analysis of what it means according to Discovery and the Syllabus is super important here. This does not mean that you need to use the sentence as your first sentence.

The same 2010 Paper 1 also asked ‘We want to believe this is how it was…’ and ‘I felt expelled and exiled…’ Although these were as first sentences, in the case where it demands to be a ‘central element’, you would then need to take into account what meaning it gives.
If we are to adapt the quotation from ‘expelled and exiled’ to ‘lost and confused’, we would be able to link it to the syllabus point, ‘Discoveries can be sudden and unexpected’ as well as ‘The ramifications of particular discoveries may differ for individuals and their worlds.’

As such, your Creative Piece must be make this nature of Discovery very clear.

Silence.
It was rare to hear silence at the Holmes household. Though only slight, laughter could always be heard from Jessica’s corner of the home. Laughter. Or yelling. The occasional cuss word. But mostly laughter.
But ever since Mrs Holmes had revealed that they would be moving interstate, there had been nothing but silence. Especially since the moving truck had not arrived with Jessica’s computer.

Whilst the fact that Discoveries can be sudden and unexpected and that the ramification of Discoveries may differ for individuals and their world, it is clear from the beginning that Jessica moving interstate will have an effect on her.

Adapting to a Visual Stimulus

You will be given anywhere from two to five images, or maybe just one image that you will be forced to use. Regardless of what image you get - a book cover, a painting or photograph - you will need to perform exactly the same kind of analysis upon it - just like you would with your textual stimuli.

In order to figure out exactly what they want, ask yourself these questions:

- What are three visual techniques being used in the image/item?
- What meaning do these techniques give?

It is fundamental to ask yourself these two questions, as you’ll probably already realise that when a composer talks about the curtains being blue, it’s not usually because blue is a great colour for the curtains, but because there is usually a deeper meaning to why they are.

AS A CENTRAL ELEMENT

The largest mistake that HSC students make is thinking that ‘as a central element’ means ‘write about what you see in the visual text’, because it doesn’t.
By knowing what the image means from answering the two questions from above, you will be able to link it back to Discovery. Let's have a look at this image:

‘The histronic wayfarer (after Bosch)’ by Tim Storrier, Archibald Prize Winner, 2012

Here's some basic analysis of this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Omissions - though it is a self-portrait, Tom Storrier portrays himself without a face.</th>
<th>Body Language - Storrier is going forth, holding his hand in exploration.</th>
<th>Point of View - We are level with Storrier.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Storrier’s identity is not his face, but the tools he carries with him (ie. paint brushes as an artist)</td>
<td>Storrier is setting out to make a discovery into how to develop as an artist due to the tools he carries.</td>
<td>We are going on the journey with Storrier, rather than leading him or being led by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to Discovery</td>
<td>Discovery of the emotional, creative, intellectual, physical and spiritual.’</td>
<td>‘Discoveries and discovering can offer new understandings and renewed perceptions of ourselves and others.’</td>
<td>The ramifications of particular discoveries may differ for individuals and their worlds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to make it your central element, it is always a good idea to ensure the marker knows that you are making the link with adapting elements of your creative piece. You can do this by employing visual techniques into your creative, like so!

[Link to website: www.artofsmart.com.au]
Silence.
It was rare to hear silence at the Holmes household. Though only slight, laughter could always be heard from Jessica’s corner of the home. Laughter. Or yelling. The occasional cuss word. But mostly laughter.
And yet… it was silent.
Boxes were packed and stacked, the furniture was wrapped in canvas, and A Man and a Van was parked in the driveway.
A last message popped up upon Steam Messenger, a faceless avatar hiding behind a few pixels upon the darkened screen.
>> ARIStotle[Supremacy]: let us know when you get there so we know you’ll be safe!
A small smile crossed Jessica’s lips as she continued typing; they didn’t even know her know her name, and she didn’t know their’s, but that didn’t matter.
>> NuClassiq[Supremacy]: i wont have internet for a bit but as soon as i do ill be back !
>> NuClassiq[Supremacy]: :)
>> ARIStotle[Supremacy]: moving is fun, you’ll make lots of friends in nsw! i did when i moved to qld.
Her stomach churned. Would she?

As you can see, I haven’t necessarily implemented the image into the creative piece, but I have grafted particular components of it, such ‘ARIStotle’ and ‘NuClassiq’ sharing the same clan name (‘Supremacy’), and going upon the same journey of moving interstate. The ramifications of discoveries differs for individuals.

Using the stimuli given in this Episode, take 5 minutes to write the beginning of your creative piece. Afterwards, ask yourself the following questions:

• Have I used the stimulus as my first sentence, or as a central element?
• What elements are common to my creative and the stimulus?
• What syllabus points of Discovery is/are being explored by your Creative?
• On a scale of 0 - 10 (0 being none, 10 being couldn’t be any more obvious), how clearly have you explored these points?

If you have not clearly explored any points of Discovery which clearly use the stimulus, you may need to try again - markers know when you’re simply regurgitating a prepared piece!

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