



Sentence Structures

for Grades 7+ Creative Writing

These structures are tried, tested and powerful. Practise them until they feel natural, then make them your own.

AO6 is worth 20% of your marks, and mastering sentence structure also lifts your AO5 grade.



How to use this sheet

Each structure has three parts: the **formula**, an **explanation of why it works**, and a **top quality example**. Read all three before you attempt the practice column.

Your practice attempts do not have to copy the example topic. Write about anything. What matters is that you use the structure.



All Structures at a Glance

⚡ Action

- Who? + What? + What? + What?
- Three present participles (-ing verbs)
- What? + Series of actions
- Action + One-word sentence
- How? + Action (adverb opener)
- Present participle + Action
- 3× 'As' opener

🌍 Setting

- Viewpoint + 3 things observed
- Around the compass
- 'Somewhere between' + What?
- Top + Middle + Bottom
- Tracking a natural feature
- Statement + : amplification

👤 Character description

- Action + Hair + Eyes (simile)
- Size + Hair + Eyes (simile)
- Age + Hair + Details + Eyes

💬 Character feelings

- Flashback (then... now...)
- Feeling + Sound
- Dialogue + hint of a lie
- Feelings repetition
- Action + 'it felt like'
- Tentative thoughts



Tips for using these structures

1. Don't copy the example topic . Apply the structure to your own scene.
2. Mix structures within a paragraph, e.g. adverb opener into a feelings repetition.
3. Short sentences hit hardest after long ones. Use the contrast deliberately.
4. If a structure feels forced, try the next one. Fluency beats performance.



Action Sentence Structures

Use these to write movement, drama and physical energy.

These structures are your toolkit for scenes where something is happening: a chase, a confrontation, a decision, a moment of realisation. The key to action writing is the verb; choose them with precision.

Formula	Why it works	Example	Your attempt
Who? + What? + What? + What?	Chains multiple actions with commas to create speed and forward momentum. The repetition of the pattern makes the reader feel breathless, perfect for fast-moving scenes.	<i>The fox broke from the undergrowth, skimmed across the road and dissolved into the opposite hedge.</i>	
Three present participles (-ing verbs)	Opening with three -ing verbs shows simultaneous struggle, effort or chaos before the main verb lands. The list builds before releasing into the action.	<i>Straining, swearing and finally laughing, they hauled the piano through the door.</i>	
What? + Series of actions	Lead with the event or force that causes things, then stack up the consequences. Great for showing destruction, power, or unstoppable movement.	<i>The wave struck the wall, dragged the chairs back, shattered the glass doors and left nothing standing but the clock on the mantelpiece.</i>	
Action + One-word sentence(s)	A very short sentence - even a single word - after a longer one lands with full force. The contrast in length IS the dramatic effect. Use it sparingly so it keeps its power.	<i>He read the message, put the phone face-down on the table and left the room. Gone.</i>	
How? + Action(adverb opener)	Opening with an adverb or adverbial phrase tells us the manner before the action. It plants the emotional register in the reader before revealing what's happening.	<i>Carefully, she lifted the letter from the doormat, as though its weight might tell her what was inside.</i>	
Present participle (-ing verb) + Action	A single -ing verb before the main clause shows one thing happening as, or just before, the main action. Tighter and more elegant than 'while she was hesitating, she...'	<i>Hesitating at the door, she rehearsed the words one more time.</i>	
3x 'As' opener	Three 'As...' clauses build a crescendo of accumulating pressure or time passing, so the main clause lands with full weight. Often used for	<i>As the light failed, as the voices faded, as the last car turned and left, he understood that he had made a mistake.</i>	

	revelation or decision moments.		
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 **Extension Task 1** Choose any two action structures from the table above and combine them in a single paragraph of 5–8 sentences. Write about a character arriving somewhere unexpected. Annotate each structure you've used in the margin.



Setting the Scene: Structures

Use these to build place, atmosphere and mood.

Good setting writing doesn't just describe everything, it is selective. Choose two or three carefully observed details that do the atmospheric work for you. These structures give you a frame; your details fill it with life.

Formula	Why it works	Example	Your attempt
Viewpoint + 3 things observed	Anchor the reader with a viewpoint character, then give three distinct details. The details do the work. Choose objects that suggest mood rather than describe it directly.	<i>He looked out from the pier. Gulls stripped chips from a child's hand. A man in a plastic mac stared at his phone. The sea moved, grey and indifferent.</i>	
Around the compass	Describing what lies in each direction (north, south, behind, ahead) anchors the reader spatially and lets you contrast two moods or ideas in the same sentence.	<i>To the north, the motorway hummed. To the south, the fields were silent. Behind her was everything she was leaving. Ahead, nothing was yet decided.</i>	
'Somewhere between' + What?	The 'somewhere between' construction creates a liminal, in-between atmosphere: time suspended, identity unclear, belonging neither here nor there. Ideal for tense or transitional moments.	<i>Somewhere between dusk and dark, somewhere between the last train and the first, the city held its breath.</i>	
Top + Middle + Bottom	Layering description spatially (above, eye level, below) builds a full three-dimensional scene and gives structure to what might otherwise feel like a random list of details.	<i>Above the rooftops, aircraft trails crossed and faded. Below them, the park was closing. At ground level, a single fox paused at the gate, assessed and passed through.</i>	
Tracking a natural feature	Follow one moving element (such as fog, fire, a river, a crowd) as it travels and takes over. The movement creates narrative tension inside what	<i>The fog moved in from the estuary. It swallowed the docks first, then the high street, then the gardens. By morning it had taken the whole town.</i>	

	would otherwise be a static description.		
Statement + : amplification	Make a bold, direct claim, then use a colon to deepen, specify or subvert it. The second half elaborates on the first. This structure signals deliberate control to an examiner.	<i>The flat was cold: not the cold of a winter morning, but the particular cold of somewhere that had been empty of life for months.</i>	

 **Extension Task 2** Write a setting paragraph of 6–8 sentences using at least two different structures from this section. Your setting: a school sports hall the night before an event. No character should appear; let the setting speak alone.



Character Description Structures

Use these to introduce characters with impact.

Resist the urge to list features from head to toe. These structures give you a sequence that builds: from body, to detail, to the eyes. The eyes should always come last: they are where character lives.

Formula	Why it works	Example	Your attempt
Action + Hair + Eyes (simile)	Start by putting the character in motion before describing them; it avoids the static 'she had...' opening. End on the eyes: they carry the most character information and the simile gives them life.	<i>She stood at the window with her back to him. Her hair was grey and closely cut. When she turned, her eyes found him immediately, quick and bright as a bird's.</i>	
Size + Hair + Eyes (simile)	Open with physical presence/scale to fix the character in space, then complicate your first impression with the eyes. The contrast between a powerful body and careful, precise eyes creates immediate intrigue.	<i>He was a large, dishevelled man; the kind who takes up a doorway rather than standing in it. His eyes, though, were careful: still and precise, like a watchmaker's.</i>	
Age + Hair + Details + Eyes	Move from broad impression (age, hair) through specific details to the eyes last. The build-up earns the payoff: the eyes become the character's defining feature because we've earned the right to look that closely.	<i>She was perhaps sixty, with the kind of careful, considered face that suggested she had always looked this age and always would. Her eyes, when they settled on you, were unexpectedly kind.</i>	



Extension Task 3 Write two character introductions using two different structures. First: a character you want the reader to like or trust. Second: a character you want the reader to be uncertain about. Use the same physical details for both, only change the sequencing and the simile.



Character Feelings Structures

Use these to reveal inner life without naming the emotion.

Examiners expect you to 'show rather than tell', and these structures are how you do it. None of them name the feeling directly. The feeling emerges from behaviour, contrast, sound, or the gap between what is said and what is true.

Formula	Why it works	Example	Your attempt
Flashback (then... now...)	Contrasting a remembered past with the present moment creates instant depth. The gap between 'then' and 'now' is where the feeling lives. You never have to name the emotion directly.	<i>Once, she had known exactly what she wanted; now she stood in the kitchen at 2am, eating cereal, genuinely unsure of anything at all.</i>	
Feeling + Sound	Interrupt an internal state with an external sound that shifts or complicates the emotion. The sound becomes the pivot: it's the moment the internal world collides with the external one.	<i>The anger was still in his chest when he heard the key in the lock... and then, absurdly, he was glad she was home.</i>	
Dialogue + hint of a lie	A character says one thing; their body does another. The tension between speech and action reveals the truth without stating it. The reader does the work, and feels the reward.	<i>'It doesn't matter,' he said, and turned back to the window before his face could say anything different.</i>	
Feelings repetition	Repeating a word or phrase with slight variation builds emotional intensity through accumulation. Each repetition narrows the focus and increases the pressure. The final repetition should be the most specific.	<i>She was tired. Tired of explaining. Tired of the same conversation. Tired of being the one who tried.</i>	
Action + 'it felt like'	Anchoring a feeling in a physical action, then extending it with a simile or metaphor, makes the abstract emotional, and the emotional tangible. The 'felt like' construction is deliberately subjective: it	<i>He deleted the email and, for a moment, it felt like the last light going out; for a moment, it felt like the end of something that had already been ending for months.</i>	

	admits the feeling without claiming it as fact.		
Tentative / conditional thoughts	Words like 'perhaps', 'maybe', 'might' and 'possibly' show a character thinking against themselves - hedging, doubting, reconsidering. This uncertainty IS the feeling. It signals an unsettled, complex inner life without spelling it out.	<i>Perhaps she had been wrong. Maybe the whole thing had simply been what it appeared to be, and she had spent three years building a meaning that wasn't there.</i>	

 **Extension Task 4** Choose one of these six structures and write a paragraph in which a character receives news they were not expecting. The news can be good or bad, your choice. Do not name their emotion anywhere in the paragraph. Read it back: can the reader tell what they're feeling?

Remember:

The examiner is not just looking for correct punctuation, they are looking for deliberate, controlled, varied sentence craft. These structures are your evidence of that control. Use them, name them in your head as you write them, and vary them constantly.

Two and a half sides of planned, crafted writing always beats four sides of aimless prose.