

GCSE English Language

Fiction Writing



Home Learning Booklet

Summer 2026

NAME: _____

When you write a piece of creative fiction, DROP/ZOOM/FLASH/ECHO is a useful structure to use:

Stage	What It Means	What You Do	Why It Works	Example
1 DROP	Describe the setting you are dropping the reader into.	Start with atmosphere, weather, place, mood.	Creates instant immersion; sets tone; establishes pathetic fallacy.	<i>The sky sagged under heavy grey clouds as the wind scraped along the empty street.</i>
2 ZOOM	Zoom in on a detail — often a character, object, or tiny moment.	Slow the pace; focus on something small but meaningful.	Builds tension; adds vivid imagery; makes the scene feel real.	<i>A single raindrop clung to the edge of her sleeve, trembling like she was.</i>
3 FLASH	A flashback or memory that reveals something important.	Link the present moment to the past; show emotion or backstory.	Deepens character; adds emotion; explains motivation.	<i>For a moment, she remembered the last time she stood here, before everything changed.</i>
4 ECHO	Return to the setting or image from the DROP (cyclical structure).	Show how the scene has changed — or how the character has changed.	Creates a crafted, circular ending; shows progression; uses pathetic fallacy to reflect change.	<i>The clouds finally broke, letting a thin line of sunlight cut across the street.</i>

This booklet will help you to practise and refine your writing skills, using with this structure.

*It's important to think of this as a **structure**, rather than four paragraphs - your writing should be approximately 2-3 sides of A4.*

1-DROP

Let's remember what DROP means:

Stage	What It Means	What You Do	Why It Works	Example
DROP	Describe the setting you are dropping the reader into.	Start with atmosphere, weather, place, mood.	Creates instant immersion; sets tone; establishes pathetic fallacy.	<i>The sky sagged under heavy grey clouds as the wind scraped along the empty street.</i>

There are two simple methods you can remember to use in the DROP paragraph, that help to make it as effective as possible:

1. Weather – pathetic fallacy
2. Senses: 3 things you can see; 2 things you can hear; 1 thing you can smell/touch.

Let's practise how to do this successfully.

DROP: Pathetic Fallacy

ACTIVITY 1: [What is pathetic fallacy? - BBC Bitesize](#) – watch this video and make notes below on what pathetic fallacy is.

Pathetic fallacy is _____

ACTIVITY 2: Match each emotion to the most suitable weather.

Emotion	Weather
Anger	A. Bright sunshine
Fear	B. Thunderstorm
Happiness	C. Fog
Sadness	D. Rain

ACTIVITY 3: Read each sentence and identify the emotion being reflected.

Pathetic fallacy example	Emotion
1.The wind howled through the empty streets.	
2.Bright sunlight danced across the meadow.	
3.Thick fog crept slowly along the ground.	
4.Thunder cracked loudly above them.	

ACTIVITY 4: Rewrite each sentence using pathetic fallacy.

Example: He was very angry → *A storm raged above him, thunder echoing his fury.*

1. He was very happy.

2. She felt sad.

3. They were scared.

4. He was nervous.

 Extension Challenge: *Rewrite the passage to include pathetic fallacy.*

It was night. She walked down the street alone. She felt scared.

DROP: Senses (3-2-1)

The 3-2-1 Rule helps to create a vivid and engaging opening by including:

- 3 things you can **see**
- 2 things you can **hear**
- 1 thing you can smell or **touch**

This helps your description feel real, immersive, and detailed. It hooks the reader immediately by building a strong atmosphere and showing imaginative control of language. For example:

The street stretched out in eerie silence, lined with flickering **streetlights**. **Shadows** twisted along the cracked pavement, while broken **windows** stared blankly into the night. A distant **siren wailed** through the air, and the **wind whispered** through the empty alleyways. The **air felt icy** against my skin.

Step 1: Start with what you can SEE (3 ideas)

✍️ Think about:

- Light / colour
- Objects / setting
- Movement

✅ Example:

The sky hung low and grey, heavy clouds rolling above deserted buildings while puddles reflected the dim light.

Step 2: Add what you can HEAR (2 ideas)

✍️ Think about:

- Loud vs quiet
- Sudden or continuous sounds

✅ Example:

Rain drummed steadily on the ground as distant thunder rumbled.

Step 3: Finish with SMELL or TOUCH (1 idea)

✍️ Think about:

- Temperature
- Texture
- Air (fresh, damp, stale)

✅ Example:

The cold air clung to my skin.

Activity 1: Rewrite using the 3–2–1 rule:

It was dark. The street was empty. It was quiet and cold.

Sentence Starter Bank

- The... stretched endlessly before me...
- Shadows...
- The sound of... echoed...
- A faint... could be heard...
- The air felt...

DROP: Semantic Field

To challenge yourself, you could try to focus your language on a specific **semantic field**.

A **semantic field** is a group of **words that are all linked to the same idea or theme**. Writers use them to create a strong atmosphere by emphasising an emotion or mood.

For example, the semantic field of **disease** might look like this:

- Illness
- Fever
- Plague
- Virus

Someone who is **crafting** their writing with a semantic field, will think about all words associated with this semantic field. For example:

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives
Illness	To infect	Contagious
Disease	To spread	Diseased
Mould	To decompose/to rot	Mouldy
Fever	To suffer	Feverish
Plague/Pestilence	To be ill	Sickly
Virus	To incubate	Catching

Once the semantic field is clear to the writer, it can support their creative ideas. For example:

Green
mould had
infected
the room

The walls
dripped
with
contagious
spores



Hope
rotted
away.

Despair had
festered here,
growing and
spreading like
mould.

The air
smelt
feverish.

ACTIVITY 1: *Can you complete the table for the semantic field of abandonment?*

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives
Wreckage	Crumbled	Neglected

Activity 2: *Can you use these words to create an effective plan for the below picture? Try to include pathetic fallacy and 3-2-1 senses.*



You can **show** a character with these 3 key methods:

1. Body Language

- *trembling hands*
- *avoiding eye contact*
- *pacing*

2. Facial Expressions

- *frowning*
- *clenched jaw*
- *wide eyes*

3. Actions

- *what the character does*
-

ACTIVITY 1: Read through the examples below and add your own. How would you show the different emotions? You could add your own emotions that best suit your style of writing in the empty rows.

Emotion	Verbs & Phrases (Show, Don't Tell) – I do	...You do
Tired	<i>dragged his feet, blinked slowly, shoulders sagged, stifled a yawn, rubbed her eyes, moved as if underwater</i>	
Shocked	<i>froze mid-step, mouth fell open, stumbled back, heartbeat kicked hard, eyes widened, words caught in her throat</i>	
Nervous	<i>fidgeted, twisted her sleeves, voice trembled, swallowed hard, foot tapped, kept glancing over his shoulder</i>	
Happy	<i>grinned wide, eyes sparkled, laughed under her breath, walked with a bounce, face lit up, couldn't stop smiling</i>	
Excited	<i>practically vibrated, words tumbled out, leaned forward eagerly, hands fluttered, heart raced, couldn't keep still</i>	

Angry	<i>jaw clenched, fists tightened, voice snapped, face flushed, slammed the door, breathing sharpened</i>	
Embarrassed	<i>cheeks burned, looked at the floor, words stumbled out, shifted awkwardly, hid behind her hair, avoided eye contact</i>	
Sad	<i>eyes brimmed, voice cracked, shoulders drooped, stared at nothing, blinked back tears, hugged knees to chest</i>	
Shy	<i>spoke barely above a whisper, hid behind someone, toes curled in shoes, kept hands tucked away, shrunk into her coat, avoided attention</i>	
Afraid	<i>heart thudded, back pressed to the wall, breath hitched, hands trembled, stepped back instinctively, eyes darted around the room</i>	

Activity 2: Rewrite the sentence using show, don't tell.

1. He was tired.

2. She was happy.

3. He was embarrassed.

3-FLASH

Let's remember what FLASH means:

Stage	What It Means	What You Do	Why It Works	Example
3 FLASH	A flashback or memory that reveals something important.	Link the present moment to the past; show emotion or backstory.	Deepens character; adds emotion; explains motivation.	<i>For a moment, she remembered the last time she stood here, before everything changed.</i>

A **flashback** is when your writing **jumps back in time** to show a memory.

Flashbacks are useful because they:

- develop characters
- create emotion
- build tension
- show advanced writing skills

Some useful tips to remember are:

Dos	Don'ts
- use past perfect tense as a time marker	- be too long-winded
- provide sufficient background information to allow reader to empathise with main character's feelings / intended actions	- overcomplicate the storyline
- sprinkle in emotions	- use cliché phrases e.g. <i>It all started like this...</i> or <i>Tears brimmed in my eyes as I recalled what happened that fateful day...</i>
- start in the rising action	- start in the midst of the climax

Activity 1: Read the paragraph and answer the questions below.

The empty playground stood silent. A chill ran through him. Suddenly, he remembered the laughter that once filled the air, children racing past him as the sun shone brightly.

1. Where does the flashback begin?

2. What is different between past and present?

Activity 2: Match each present moment to the most appropriate flashback idea.

Present	Flashback
A dark, empty house	A sunny beach day
A stormy night	A moment of laughter
A broken friendship	A warm family dinner

Activity 3: Choose one of the above ideas and create a short flashback paragraph. There are some sentence starters underneath that you might find useful.

Use this structure:

1. Present moment (1–2 sentences)
2. Flashback (1–2 sentences)
3. Return to present (1 sentence)

Example: The street was empty and silent. He remembered when it was full of life, music echoing and people laughing. Now, only silence remained.

Flashback starters

- *It hadn't always been like this...*
 - *He remembered when...*
 - *Once, the room had been...*
 - *A memory surfaced...*
 - *Years ago...*
-

4-ECHO

Let's remember what ECHO means:

Stage	What It Means	What You Do	Why It Works	Example
4 ECHO	Return to the setting or image from the DROP (cyclical structure).	Show how the scene has changed — or how the character has changed.	Creates a crafted, circular ending; shows progression; uses pathetic fallacy to reflect change.	<i>The clouds finally broke, letting a thin line of sunlight cut across the street.</i>

A cyclical structure / circular ending is often used by writers to create a contrast between what was happening at the beginning and what was happening at the end – perhaps nothing has changed, perhaps it has changed for the better, or, worse.

ACTIVITY 1: Read the opening and ending to this short story, 'Forbidden Fruit', by Roshani Chokshi, and answer the question.



The Opening

Do not trust the fruit of Maria Makiling.

If you find your pockets full of thorny fruit, throw it out the window. Do not taste it. Do not stroke the rind and wonder at the impossible pink of its colour . . .

Fill your pockets with salt. Turn your shirt inside out. Tell Maria you have taken nothing.

The Ending

That is why you must turn your clothes inside out.

That is why you must empty your pockets of fruit.

For the Mountain does not like you to take things that do not belong to you.

Q: Why is this a circular narrative?

Now that you're clear on what a cyclical structure is, let's brush up on some tips for what to include in your ECHO paragraph:

1. **Bring back an image, sound, or detail from the opening**
2. **Use pathetic fallacy** to show the development of a character/action/setting.

3. **Repeat a phrase — but change its meaning.** This is a subtle but powerful technique. For example:

- Opening: *I wasn't ready.*
- Echo: *This time, I was ready.*

Or:

- Opening: *The door was already open.*
- Echo: *The door was still open — but now I understood why.*

4. **Keep the ECHO short, reflective, and controlled.** The ECHO paragraph is usually 3–5 sentences. It should feel like the story is closing in on itself. Think of it like a camera pulling back for the final shot.

Activity 2: Read the DROP and ECHO carefully and answer the questions.

DROP:

Rain hammered the pavement as the wind howled through the empty streets.

ECHO:

The rain had softened now, whispering against the pavement as the wind drifted quietly through the streets.

1. What detail is repeated from the DROP?

2. What has changed?

3. What might this suggest about the character?

Activity 3: Find the connection and draw lines between matching ideas in each paragraph:

DROP:

- The sky was heavy with dark clouds
- The street was silent
- The wind roared loudly

ECHO:

- The silence no longer felt threatening

- The clouds had lifted
- The wind faded into a gentle breeze

Q: What pattern do you notice?

Activity 4: *Finish each ECHO by linking it clearly to the DROP.*

Focus on:

- *repeating the image*
- *showing a change*

1. **DROP:**

Grey clouds pressed low over the rooftops.

ECHO:

The clouds were still there, but now _____

2. **DROP:**

The playground was empty and lifeless.

ECHO:

The playground stood before me again, yet _____

Activity 5: *You now need to write both a DROP and an ECHO.*

1. Write a DROP (2 sentences)

Describe:

- a stormy street
- a dark room
- an empty park

2. Write an ECHO (2–3 sentences)

You must:

- repeat at least one key detail
- show how it has changed
- suggest a different feeling

Put It ALL Into Practice

Activity 1: Read the exam question below. Choose a task and plan in the box provided below.



Either: Write a description of a train station as suggested by this picture

Or: Write the opening of a story that begins 'When he left that day, I did not know I would not see him again for five years...'

Planning Space

Activity 2: Write your response below. You might want to remind yourself of the success criteria (see page 25).

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Activity 3: Re-read each of your paragraphs and self-assess them one at a time. Tick the criteria you have met; highlight the criteria you did not.

☒ **Self-Checklist: DROP (Describing a Setting)**

- ☐ I described the setting clearly (what it looks like)
- ☐ I included **specific details**, not vague ideas
- ☐ I used **sensory description (3–2–1 where possible)**
- ☐ I created a clear **atmosphere or mood**
- ☐ I used **ambitious vocabulary**
- ☐ I may have included a technique (e.g. pathetic fallacy or semantic field)
- ☐ My description helps the reader **visualise the scene**

☒ **Self-Checklist: Zoom (Focus on a Detail)**

- ☐ I zoomed in on **one small, specific detail** (object, sound, movement)
- ☐ I described it in **close, precise detail**
- ☐ I used **interesting word choices** (verbs/adjectives)
- ☐ I made the detail **meaningful or symbolic**
- ☐ I helped the reader imagine it clearly
- ☐ My zoom adds to the **overall mood or tension**

☒ **Self-Checklist: Flashback**

- ☐ My flashback is clearly **shown as a memory**
- ☐ It links to the **present moment**
- ☐ I return back to the present after it
- ☐ It reveals something about **character or setting**
- ☐ It creates **contrast (past vs present)**
- ☐ It is **short and relevant**

☒ **Self-Checklist: Echo**

- ☐ I repeated an idea, image, or phrase **from earlier in my writing**

- o The echo links to the **beginning or a key moment**
- o I slightly **changed or developed it** (not copied it exactly)
- o The echo shows **change or impact**
- o It creates a sense of **structure and control**
- o It leaves the reader with a **strong final impression**

Activity 4: *Re-write your creative writing, adding in what you missed last time.*

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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