

The Ultimate GCSE

Creative Writing Checklist

★ 1. IDEA & PRE-WRITING CHECKLIST

Before you start writing, make sure you have...

A clear story idea

- ☐ A character with a goal, desire, or problem
- ☐ A setting that supports the mood
- ☐ A main conflict or tension
- ☐ A moment of change or realisation
- ☐ An emotional focus (fear, hope, loss, curiosity, guilt, pride, etc.)
- ☐ A single, focused moment or event (don't try to tell a whole life story)

A clear narrative purpose

- ☐ What do you want the reader to FEEL?
- ☐ What do you want the reader to KNOW?
- ☐ What impression do you want examiners to have?

A planned structure

- ☐ Exposition: character + setting introduced
- ☐ Rising Action: tension builds
- ☐ Climax: turning point
- ☐ Falling Action: reaction to climax
- ☐ Resolution: end note, shift, or change
- Optional:
 - ☐ Cyclical structure
 - ☐ Flashback / flash-forward
 - ☐ Dual timeline or perspective (advanced)

★ 2. OPENING CHECKLIST

Your opening must hook the reader immediately

- ☐ Start with a clear atmosphere or tone
- ☐ Introduce the character subtly (don't info-dump)
- ☐ Hint at the conflict/tension early
- ☐ Use sensory description for vividness
- ☐ Show beginnings of character emotion
- ☐ Avoid clichés like “It was a dark and stormy night”
- ☐ Use short, impactful sentences for dramatic effect (if appropriate)

Effective opening techniques:

- ☐ Start in the middle of action
- ☐ Start with an unusual detail
- ☐ Start with contrast (calm setting + uneasy undertone)
- ☐ Start with character emotion

★ 3. SETTING CHECKLIST

Create a vivid world that feels real

- ☐ Sight (colour, light, shadow, shape)
- ☐ Sound (near, far, sharp, muffled, patterns)
- ☐ Smell (environmental or atmospheric)
- ☐ Touch (temperature, texture)
- ☐ Taste (if relevant)

Advanced level:

- ☐ Use the setting to reflect the character's emotion
- ☐ Use symbolism or motif (weather, light/dark, nature, decay)
- ☐ Use contrast (beauty hiding danger; calm masking fear)
- ☐ Keep description purposeful, not random

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★ 4. CHARACTER CHECKLIST

Create believable, interesting characters

Character basics:

- ☐ A clear sense of personality
- ☐ A goal or want
- ☐ Something at stake
- ☐ A flaw, fear, or secret
- ☐ A reaction to the world around them

How to reveal character:

- ☐ Through actions
- ☐ Through internal thoughts
- ☐ Through body language
- ☐ Through dialogue (only if meaningful)
- ☐ Through reactions to conflict or pressure

Avoid:

- ☐ Listing physical traits
- ☐ Over-explaining
- ☐ Unnecessary backstory

★ 5. PLOT & STRUCTURE CHECKLIST

Smooth organisation = higher marks in AO5

Must-haves:

- ☐ Logical, controlled sequence
- ☐ Clear rise and fall of tension
- ☐ Well-placed climax
- ☐ Strong ending, not rushed
- ☐ Paragraphs structured with a clear purpose

Structural techniques:

- ☐ Shift in focus
- ☐ Zoom in/out
- ☐ Circular ending
- ☐ Repetition of key image or phrase
- ☐ Foreshadowing
- ☐ Time shift (flashback/forward)
- ☐ Cliffhanger or open ending (avoid overusing)

★ 6. LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES CHECKLIST

This is where examiners award top AO5 marks

Imagery:

- ☐ Metaphor
- ☐ Simile
- ☐ Personification
- ☐ Pathetic fallacy
- ☐ Symbolism
- ☐ Motif
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Sentence variety:

- ☐ Short sentences for impact
- ☐ Long complex sentences for detail
- ☐ Fragments (carefully)
- ☐ Fronted adverbials
- ☐ Adverbial phrases

Vocabulary:

- ☐ Topic-appropriate
- ☐ Avoid forced thesaurus words
- ☐ Use verbs for precision, not adjectives
- ☐ Strong nouns and verbs > overloaded adjectives
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Tone & voice:

- ☐ Consistent tone
- ☐ Clear narrative voice
- ☐ Internal thoughts to show emotion
- ☐ Controlled levels of formality

★ 7. DIALOGUE CHECKLIST

(Use only if it adds meaning)

- ☐ Sounds natural
- ☐ Reveals character or tension
- ☐ Advances plot
- ☐ Correctly punctuated
- ☐ Not overused
- ☐ Balanced with description
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★ 8. CLIMAX CHECKLIST

This is where the story peaks

- ☐ A shift in emotion, perspective, or action
- ☐ Heightened tension
- ☐ A decisive moment or realisation
- ☐ Strong imagery
- ☐ Link to earlier foreshadowing
- ☐ Character reacts meaningfully
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★ 9. ENDING CHECKLIST

The end should feel satisfying, not abrupt

- ☐ Clear resolution OR purposeful ambiguity
- ☐ Emotional shift in character
- ☐ Echo of an earlier image/symbol
- ☐ Return to or twist on the opening (cyclical structure)
- ☐ Leave the reader with something to think about
- ☐ Avoid moral lessons (“And the moral is...”)
- ☐ Avoid clichés
- ☐ Don’t suddenly change genre or pace

★ 10. AO6 TECHNICAL ACCURACY CHECKLIST

Essential for top marks

Spelling:

- ☐ Commonly confused words correct (their/there/they're)
- ☐ Homophones correct
- ☐ Complex vocabulary spelt correctly

Grammar:

- ☐ Consistent tense
- ☐ Clear pronouns
- ☐ Subject–verb agreement
- ☐ Active/passive voice used appropriately

Punctuation:

- ☐ Full stops, commas, capitals
- ☐ Correct dialogue punctuation
- ☐ Controlled use of:
 - ☐ Semicolons
 - ☐ Colons
 - ☐ Dashes
 - ☐ Ellipses (sparingly)
 - ☐ Commas in complex sentences

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Sentence control:

- ☐ Avoid run-ons
- ☐ Avoid sentence fragments unless intentional
- ☐ Mixture of long and short sentences