

# Responding to the Shakespeare Extract Question

## Introduction

The Shakespeare text extract question can seem like an intimidating prospect: not only are learners having to deal with four hundred-year-old language, but they only have around twenty minutes to respond. However, they should already be very familiar with the whole text, and will therefore be able to use their existing knowledge of the play and its characters. Furthermore, learners have the extract printed on the question paper, they don't have to search their memories for quotations – they are there in front of them. This guide offers an approach to work on extract questions. It is designed to help learners make the most of their time in the examination and produce an effective response. In addition, there is the opportunity to look at responses from other GCSE candidates and some ideas to help learners to develop their own responses.

The examples and tasks that follow are based on the question on "Romeo and Juliet" that is in the SAMs. However, the approach described here applies for all the Shakespeare texts in the Eduqas GCSE English Literature specification.

The mark scheme for this question is divided into two columns:

**AO1 - Read, understand and respond to texts.**

**AO2 - Analyse the language, form and structure.**

The Assessment Objectives have equal weighting, so responses need to address them equally.

It is a good idea to divide the approach to the Shakespeare extract question into two stages:

1. Reading and Highlighting
2. Writing

As learners only have around twenty minutes to respond, the first stage must be brief, ideally taking no more than **five** minutes. However, if they work through this stage sensibly, it should save them time for the writing stage and help ensure their written response is focused and effective.

## Reading and Highlighting

Before learners begin writing, careful reading of both the question and the extract is essential. Encourage them to read the question to find the focus, quickly read the extract to establish their first thoughts and have them highlight parts of the text they want to use in their response.

### 1. Finding the Focus

It is vital that the response has a clear focus on what the question is asking. The idea of **focus** is the first descriptor of the AO1 column of the mark scheme, so the examiner will be looking for this throughout the response.

***Task:** Look at the extract question below and highlight the key words to help you establish the focus.*

Look at how Juliet and her father speak and behave here. What does it reveal to an audience about their relationship at this point in the play? Refer closely to details from the extract to support your answer.

[15]

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[15]

Of course, in a sense every word is important in the question, but you need to highlight the main ones that will give your response a clear focus.

### 2. First Thoughts

Now learners will need to read the extract *with the focus in mind*, to establish their first thoughts on what they will be writing about in their response.

These might include:

- Where does this extract fit into the play?
- Which characters are involved and what do we learn about them?
- What's happening, and how does this relate to the focus of the question?
- What is the language Shakespeare has used telling us here?

**Task:** Quickly read the extract and, with the focus in mind, note down your first thoughts.

- CAPULET: Soft, take me with you, take me with you, wife.  
How will she none? Doth she not give us thanks?  
Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blest,  
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought  
So worthy a gentleman to be her bride?
- JULIET: Not proud you have, but thankful that you have.  
Proud can I never be of what I hate,  
But thankful even for hate that is meant love.
- CAPULET: How, how! How, how, chop-logic! What is this?  
“Proud”, and “I thank you”, and “I thank you not”,  
And yet, “Not proud”, mistress minion you?  
Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no pouds,  
But fettle your fine joints ‘gainst Thursday next,  
To go with Paris to Saint Peter’s Church,  
I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.  
Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!  
You tallow-face.
- LADY CAPULET: (To her husband) Fie, fie! What, are you mad?
- JULIET: Good father, I beseech you on my knees,  
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.
- CAPULET: Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!  
I tell thee what: get thee to church o’ Thursday,  
Or never after look me in the face.  
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me.  
My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest  
That God had lent us but this only child,  
But now I see this one is one too much,  
And that we have a curse in having her.  
Out on her, hilding!

Your first thoughts may have included:

- This is the lowest point in Juliet and her father Lord Capulet’s relationship.
- Capulet’s speech dominates the extract as he reacts to Juliet’s refusal to marry Paris.
- He shows feelings of disbelief, followed by anger and impatience.
- Juliet desperately tries to calm him down and explain her feelings, but with no success.

Learners may have had other thoughts and impressions on what the extract tells us about Juliet and Capulet's relationship; these are probably just as valid. Remember: in GCSE English Literature, if ideas can be supported with evidence from the text, they will be rewarded by the examiner.

In the exam, learners won't need to write their first thoughts down at this stage. However, it is useful to have them in mind to help with the highlighting of the text.

### 3. Highlighting the Extract

Learners can use a coloured highlighter in the exam, or simply use a pen to underline key parts of the text. The point of this is to pick out the most important key words and phrases that can be used in the response, hopefully saving precious writing time.

**Task:** Highlight 8-10 key parts of the extract to show:

*Capulet's disbelief and confusion in yellow; Capulet's anger and impatience in red;*

*Juliet's desperate attempts to calm her father down in green.*

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A highlighted response to the task might look like this:

CAPULET: Soft, take me with you, take me with you, wife.  
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This would give learners plenty of material for a full written response. In the exam, it would not be practical to use different colours, but highlighting is an effective way of separating the words and phrases they might want to use from those they don't. Of course, all learners will make different selections; as long as there is even coverage of the extract and the key ideas within the focus of the question, that's fine.

Having established the focus of the question, and having had some first thoughts about the extract and highlighted some key parts of the text to use, learners can now focus on writing.

## Writing

Most of the exam time should be spent writing. Hopefully, if learners have used their first five minutes to read and highlight, they should know quite a lot of what they're going to write already.

However, before looking at some examples, it's worth thinking about a couple of things that can be tricky when it comes to getting the most out of written responses.

### Openings

Because there will only be about fifteen minutes' writing time, there is little point in producing a detailed introduction. However, it can be helpful to write a **brief** opening which offers an effective way in to the extract. This might involve:

**"Placing" the extract** – briefly showing knowledge of where this extract fits into the play and perhaps suggesting why this might be a significant moment in the play's structure. Learners should avoid 'telling the story', they are being examined on their response to the extract not their knowledge of the whole play.

**Offering some overview** – showing a clear, focused perspective on the key ideas and events within the extract can be very useful before getting into the analysis of detail.

**Task:** Look at the following examples of openings and decide which is the most effective.

#### Opening A

In this essay I will be discussing how Juliet and Lord Capulet speak and behave in the extract and what it tells us about their relationship at this point in the play. It is not good here at all because they are arguing about whether Juliet should marry Paris and Lord Capulet shows he is in charge and is forcing her even though she is begging him not to.

**Comment:** *The first couple of lines here will not receive credit so there is very little point in saying what you are going to discuss in advance – just do it. The rest of this opening offers a brief but valid summary of the extract, showing some understanding.*

#### Opening B

This extract comes from Act 3 of the play where Shakespeare shows how bad Juliet and her father's relationship is. Juliet doesn't want to marry Paris because she is already married to Romeo, but Lord Capulet doesn't know this and shows how confused and angry he gets when she refuses his wishes.

**Comment:** *This is better: the candidate places the extract correctly in Act 3 of the play and shows understanding of the background to the exchange between the characters. A couple of key elements in the dynamic of the relationship (Capulet's confusion and anger) are identified.*

#### Opening C

This extract is from Act 3 scene 5 of the play and shows the lowest point in Juliet's relationship with her father. Their previously close relationship has broken down and Capulet shows incomprehension and anger as he asserts his authority over his increasingly desperate daughter.

**Comment:** *The extract is placed precisely, and the candidate offers some clear overview of where it fits into the changing relationship between Juliet and her father, and of the dynamic between them in this exchange. It is the most confident of the three openings.*

## Developing AO2

It is worth considering how the selections highlighted in the extract can help address AO2. This is the Assessment Objective in the second column of the mark scheme that deals with language, form and structure. Often, this is an area where learners are less confident.

AO2 is defined in the exam specification as the ability to:

*Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.*

In other words, in this question, learners need to show they can write about **how** Shakespeare uses language, form and structure to tell us about Juliet and Lord Capulet's relationship in the extract.

It's helpful to look at those three key terms, language, form and structure, more closely:

### Language

What do specific words and phrases tell us about how the characters are feeling? Are there particular language choices that might have an impact on the other characters or the audience? What does the punctuation tell us?

### Form

Are the characters speaking in prose or verse? Why might this be? If there is verse, is it blank (unrhyming) or is there a rhyme scheme? Why might Shakespeare have chosen to do this?

### Structure

Does the sentence structure tell us anything about the feelings or abilities of the characters? Are there interruptions or pauses that might tell us something? Are there turning points in this extract? How does the extract affect the overall structure of the play?

It's important that learners don't just search for and spot language techniques. Finding and identifying a simile won't get them very far, but discussing the **effect** of that simile will be more successful.

**Task:** Look at the following selections from the extract and note down your ideas for hitting AO2 in this question:

**“How will she none? Doth she not give us thanks?  
Is she not proud?”**

Your ideas may have included:

- Capulet's insistent questioning here shows his confusion and disbelief about Juliet's refusal to marry Paris.
- The use of short sentences emphasises his mounting anger.

- Capulet refuses to talk directly to his daughter in these lines; instead he talks about her to his wife, using the repeated word “she”, which illustrates his refusal to engage with Juliet and listen to her point of view.

**“Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!  
You tallow-face.”**

Your ideas may have included:

Capulet’s anger is shown by the insults he throws at Juliet. For example, calling her “green-sickness carrion” is a particularly unpleasant image, comparing her as a teenager to rotting meat. This highlights his feelings of disgust.

The use of exclamation marks here shows Capulet’s anger and frustration at the situation.

The repetition of the word “out” in these lines emphasises his anger and suggests he wants Juliet out of his sight.

**“Good father, I beseech you on my knees,  
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.”**

Your ideas may have included:

- Juliet uses polite, respectful language towards Capulet, such as “Good father” to try to calm him down.
- The phrase “I beseech you on my knees” suggests Juliet is begging her father to be heard while kneeling, an action which shows her desperation.
- The phrase “but to speak a word” shows how Juliet is desperate to explain her feelings, but Capulet’s immediate response shows he will not listen to her.

## Levels of written response

Having read and highlighted the extract, thought about openings and how to address AO2 in their responses, learners should now be focused on expressing their ideas clearly and concisely. To do this successfully, they will need to recognise the difference between the different levels of written response that are reflected in the mark scheme:

- Description
- Discussion
- Analysis

### Some examples:

#### Description

Lord Capulet asks his wife why Juliet has said she doesn't want to marry Paris, "How will she none? Doth she not give us thanks?" Then Juliet explains that she feels "hate" for Paris, which makes Capulet so cross that he threatens to "drag" her to the wedding if she will not go herself. He also calls her horrible things like "green-sickness carrion" and "baggage".

**Comment:** *This response describes what is happening in the extract with some focus on the relationship, with use of quotations in support. However, it doesn't make clear points and there is no real analysis of the language Capulet uses here. It is typical of a higher Band 2 / lower Band 3 answer.*

#### Discussion

Capulet shows he is shocked and bewildered by Juliet's attitude and asks rhetorical questions to show this, "How will she none? Does she not give us thanks?" He makes it sound like he likes Paris more than her by calling him "worthy" and her "unworthy". When he threatens to "drag" her "on a hurdle" to church, it suggests that he is prepared to treat her violently to get his way. This underlines how angry he is.

**Comment:** *This is a stronger response. The candidate discusses the extract with clear focus, making sensible points and apt inferences from the quotations they have selected. There is some appreciation of the implicit meaning of the language Capulet uses towards Juliet, addressing AO2. It is typical of a higher Band 3 / lower Band 4 answer.*

#### Analysis

Lord Capulet is stunned by Juliet's refusal to marry Paris. The phrase "How, how! How, how chop-logic!" shows his shock, which is highlighted by the repetition here. In addition, the use of the exclamation marks suggests he is furious about Juliet not following his decisions. This fury is further emphasised by the list of insulting names he calls her: "mistress minion" and "baggage" are sexist terms, and "green-sickness carrion" compares her to rotting meat, highlighting his extreme disgust at her behaviour. These insults suggest he is wants to upset Juliet and is deliberately taking his anger out on her.

**Comment:** *This is the best response of the three, offering a focused commentary of some of Capulet's speech and behaviour towards Juliet. There is confident appreciation of implicit meaning and the analysis of language choice and punctuation scores well for AO2. It is typical of a higher Band 4 / Band 5 answer.*

**Task:** Look at the following paragraphs from three different GCSE candidates' responses and rank-order them:

### Response 1

Juliet has to beg her father to listen to her, which shows he doesn't really care about her opinion, "I beseech you on my knees / Hear me with patience". She also tries to flatter him by calling him "Good father". However, Capulet doesn't listen and just continues to insult her with phrases like "disobedient wretch". Next, he threatens her, saying that he will never look or talk to her again if she doesn't marry Paris: "...get thee to church o' Thursday, Or never after look me in the face. Speak not, reply not, do not answer me."

This tells the audience that he doesn't care about her happiness and that they are not actually very close, as he could just shut her out of his life. He then claims she is too much to handle, "one is too much" and calls her a "curse" on the family, which is a really strong, negative word to use.

### Response 2

Juliet is begging her father to let her speak but he doesn't take any notice of her and just insults her even more, "young baggage! disobedient wretch". He orders her to get to church "o' Thursday" so she has no choice at all. This shows that their relationship isn't good and Capulet feels like he has to stay in control. He uses a list of three, saying, "Speak not, reply not, do not answer me." When he says "my fingers itch" he is saying he wants to give her a slap. He complains to his wife and says he wishes that they had never had Juliet "one is one too much".

### Response 3

Juliet states "Good father", the adjective "good" suggesting she's trying to flatter him to make him less angry. She gets down on her knees to "beseech" him to let her speak, her submissive position conveying her desperation. The fact that she uses a long, measured sentence in blank verse here, contrasting with Capulet's short, abrupt sentences, show she is making every effort to calm him down. However, Juliet has no success, as Capulet simply continues his tirade of insults, "young baggage! disobedient wretch!". When he says his "fingers itch" it suggests he is close to hitting his daughter to express his authority, and it could also imply he is barely in control of his temper. The fact that he is close to using violence against Juliet shows that he would rather hurt her than try to understand her views.

<i>Rank order (lowest to highest):</i>	<i>Response 2</i>
	<i>Response 1</i>
	<i>Response 3</i>

## Response 1

**Comment:** *The candidate responds with focus, making valid points with apt support and showing appreciation of sub-text. One quotation is over-long, particularly when there is so little time to work with. However, there is sound understanding and some probing of language choice towards the end, addressing AO2.*

*Likely outcome: high Band 3*

## Response 2

**Comment:** *There is some focus and relevant discussion here, although the candidate mainly takes a descriptive approach. However, there are a couple of sound inferences (Capulet wanting to stay in control and having thoughts of violence). A language technique is identified (list of three), but there is no comment offered on the effect, which is an opportunity missed.*

*Likely outcome: high Band 2 / low Band 3*

## Response 3

**Comment:** *The candidate makes thoughtful points with well-chosen selections in support. There is confident analysis of language, form and structure, so AO2 marks will be high. There is some exploration of alternative interpretations, and ideas are conveyed concisely and coherently.*

*Likely outcome: high Band 4 / Band 5*

**Task:** *having worked through this guide, now write your own response. Ask a classmate or your teacher to assess it using the mark scheme.*

The more extract questions learners do, the better their responses should become. To help them practise, key parts of the Shakespeare text can be selected to create questions on characters, relationships, themes and how mood and atmosphere is created.