

Ten indicators of A* potential in English

If you're talented, you shouldn't see getting an A* as a bonus – something that's just happened and taken you beyond an A. You should have a determination to get one, since it ranks you in the top 10% of English students in England.

So you need to know what to do to get an A*:

READING

1. You will be confident in analysing language, knowing that this means answering the questions 'why?' and 'how'
2. You will be tentative in your responses, using words like *seems, may be, suggests, implies, infers, seems to demonstrate*
3. You will comment briskly on what the text is about, then who it is by and for, and then (the important stuff) comment with laser-like detail on the 'how' of presentation (a bit) and language (a lot)
4. You use commas within but not between sentences, and colons and semi-colons
5. You don't use the first word that comes into your head; you realise that language is rich and that we make choices about whether to say "the big event" or the "major / significant / momentous / important / ground-breaking / event" based on context and audience

WRITING

1. Be able to write formal and impersonal prose that is not pompous but which holds the reader's interest and clarifies things
2. Be able to write confident, rich prose which draws the reader in, making us wonder quite which word will happen next
3. Use a range of punctuation to add nuances to your work – commas, semi-colons, colons, dashes.
4. Be able to judge the audience and genre, and write in a style that is appropriate
5. Use long and short sentences, big and small words, and write sentences in time and untimed conditions that always interest us, but sometimes provoke and sometimes mystify us

TO DO ALL THIS YOU SHOULD:

- read a lot (eg 'The Week' and, always, have a novel on the go): I do mean a lot
- write a lot (eg a daily diary)
- think as you're writing about the effects of your writing
- take risks rather than rely on formulas
- enjoy the feeling of being able to interpret the world (through reading) and express viewpoints (through writing)