# HSC hub - English Bites

Student support resource to support preparation for the HSC English EAL/D course module Focus on Writing.

## Focus on Writing

On the first few pages you will find advice outlining why this resource will be useful to you and suggestions about how to use this resource.

### **Resource topic - setting and symbolism in imaginative writing**

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### Resource - setting and symbolism in imaginative writing

**How will the activities in this resource help you write more effectively in this module?**

The activities in this resource are designed to support these points from the Focus on Writing module description in the EAL/D syllabus. Students:

* develop and refine their knowledge and skills in writing
* experiment with techniques, styles and forms
* produce their own crafted works, for example creative... imaginative... texts
* generate ideas.

[NSW Syllabus for the Australian curriculum English EAL/D Stage 6](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-english/english-eald-2017) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales 2017. See the NESA website for additional copyright information.

### Connecting to the examination

The activities in this resource will help you develop your skills in answering questions in the examination. These could be similar to this example from the NESA sample examination:

**Example A (15 marks)**

Use the paragraph below as inspiration for a piece of creative writing where a character learns something about themself as a result of their environment.

The afternoon sun is a microwave oven, door wide open, cooking all exposed flesh. Rottnest is small as islands go, only eight square miles of naked rock and baked gullies, twists and bends, ups and downs, and the Indian Ocean is always visible or always around the next bend. Halfway up a hill I dismount and push. My pulse bangs my eardrums and my shirt’s sticking to my unflat torso.

From ‘The Bone Clocks’, David Mitchell

[Sample questions HSC Examination English EALD Paper 1](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/ce32b8d5-4096-461e-8bd5-81cbc81a83d6/sample-questions-new-hsc-english-eald-paper-1-exam-2019.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales 2018.

### Instructions for students using this resource independently:

* Writing is best done a little at a time and often; the activities below are designed to be done in approximately 15-20 minutes each. We suggest you do one a day.
* Writing also works well if it is collaborative; share your pieces with your teacher or a trusted friend and give positive, practical and encouraging feedback.
* These activities are about sparking ideas and getting you seeing the world around you as a writer would. They are not about being ‘good’ or ‘right’ or punctuation, spelling or grammar. Try these activities in a creative spirit, then work on the details of your control of language later.
* While great improvement will come from getting feedback on your writing, simply writing every day, using activities such as these (which you can do multiple times), will also be very helpful. Writing is like a muscle that needs a constant workout.

## Activities

Take 15-20 minutes to write each of these scenarios in order to work on your ability to use setting and symbolism to engage the reader when you are writing imaginatively (or even discursively!) As you write, you may notice some key recurring ideas:

* Writers **suggest** using symbolism and setting (similar to show not tell).
* Writers constantly experiment, **rewrite**, and write the same scene from a new point-of-view, then compare versions to develop their characters, stories and themes.
* Writers use the **senses** (all the senses at one point or another) to develop setting.

### 1. The Room

Describe a bedroom from the point of view of:

* a parent whose child has left home for university
* a child whose parents have just split up, and
* a teenager who has just been grounded for a month and been sent to their room.

Use the room symbolically to reflect their mood and use the senses. Key advice here: make the description **work** for you. What would each character see differently and describe differently that would match the situation?

### 2. When and where are we?

Write the first paragraph of a story that clearly introduces the time and context of the story without ever actually stating the place and time.

Share it with a partner and ask her to guess the time and place.

As an extra challenge – make it clear that something is either wrong with the scene or that something is about to happen.

Key advice here: use symbolism and setting to **suggest**. Be subtle. Hint.

###  3. Do I fit?

Write a setting where the character feels comfortable in the place. Then, write another setting where they don’t fit and feel out of place. How could you show/suggest the differences between the two places?

Key advice here: character is the key. The description of the two places can suggest something very interesting about the character.

### 4. Weather spot

Choose a weather event to introduce in the first line of a story – how does it set the mood of the story?

Experiment with how you introduce it:

* start with an adjective
* start with a verb
* use an animal to describe the weather
* switch the point of view to an inanimate object.

Now, choose one of these and continue the story. How does that first line influence what comes next?

Key advice here: use the setting and the weather to set up the mood for a story.

### 5. It’s all Relative

Describe a familiar place, such as a classroom, a beach or a shopping centre, under two different sets of circumstances, such as:

* day and night
* summer and winter
* crowded and empty.

Key advice here: try to focus on the same objects or places in the two descriptions. For example: how will you describe that tree differently when the park is empty, compared to when it is full of people? As you write, you might think about:

How the writer of one of your prescribed texts describes a place in two different ways

What language devices are used by the writer to describe the place. Try using one of those language devices in your own writing.

### 6. Happy Holidays?

Write a description of a festive holiday scene. Use details that appeal to your reader’s five senses. Your reader should be able to visualize a picture of holiday foods, music, colours and so on, that are appropriate to the mood you are trying to create.

Next, try writing a description of a dreary or scary holiday scene. Be sure to use appropriate sensory details again. The smells, tastes, sounds, objects, for example, should be very different from those you picked for your "festive" description. Can you create a story that grows out of one or both of these descriptions?

### 7. My Place

Think of a natural setting that has affected you. The place may be one you visited on vacation once, one you visit frequently, or perhaps it is even your backyard. How does this place affect your thoughts, feelings, mood, and actions? Start by making a list of as many objects from the place as you can. Then, write an autobiographical piece describing how this setting impacted on you.

Key advice here: get very **specific**. Use details. Not ‘a bird in the tree’, but ‘the black cockatoo scratching its tail feathers against the cone of the banksia seed’.

Experiment with how many objects you include. What happens if you accumulate a lot of detail in your piece? Do you like it more or less? Is it more or less interesting or powerful?

### Practise examination response

Now you have practised using symbolism and establishing setting in your writing write a response to NESA Example A above. Or, create your own version of this sample examination question and write a response to that instead. Swap your response with a peer and provide each other feedback. Pay particular attention to the purposeful use of symbolism and the way they have crafted setting for particular effect.

## Some great examples for modelling

Here are some prescribed texts that you could use as models for your experimentation with symbolism and setting:

* the opening of 'Past the Shallows' by Favel Parrett
* Descriptions in ‘Swallow the Air’ by Tara June Winch
* descriptions in ‘Fahrenheit 451’ by Ray Bradbury
* descriptions in ‘The Pedestrian’ by Ray Bradbury
* descriptions in ‘Crouch End’ by Stephen King.