

# M A S T E R I N G M A C B E T H

Preparing for the iGCSE.

The iGCSE can be a difficult exam to navigate. It does not require its students to be particularly incisive literary critics, but it does require them to make sure that they are able to respond effectively based on a very specific and rigorous criteria. Students can struggle with this, either because they do not know about the criteria, they struggle to direct their creativity in a way that responds to understand what's required of them, or for any number of other reasons. This document shows how our tutors can help students deal with this. Here, a tutor goes through a student's essay line by line, offering specific feedback that both helps the student respond in a way that better meets the criteria and insight that keeps the student engaged. At the end, they provide some overall feedback, identifying the strengths of the essay and where it could stand to improve. We hope you enjoy it!

## THE QUESTION

Explore the Idea That Macbeth Gradually Loses Control of Himself and his Relationships. Refer to This Extract From Act 3 Scene 2 and Elsewhere in the Play.

## THE EXTRACT

### LADY MACBETH

Come on;  
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;  
Be bright and jovial among your guests to-night.

### MACBETH

So shall I, love; and so, I pray, be you:  
Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;  
Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue:  
Unsafe the while, that we  
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams,  
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,  
Disguising what they are.

### LADY MACBETH

You must leave this.

### MACBETH

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!  
Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.

### LADY MACBETH

But in them nature's copy's not eterne.

### MACBETH

There's comfort yet; they are assailable;  
Then be thou jocund: ere the bat hath flown  
His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons  
The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums  
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done  
A deed of dreadful note.

### LADY MACBETH

What's to be done?

### MACBETH

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,  
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,  
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;  
And with thy bloody and invisible hand  
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond  
Which keeps me pale! Light thickens; and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood:  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;  
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.  
Thou marvell'st at my words: but hold thee still;  
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.  
So, prithee, go with me.

## THE CRITERIA

**AO1:** Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

1. Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
2. Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

**AO2:** Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

**AO3:** Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

**AO4:** Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

I have provided the criteria along which examiners mark iGCSE essays here because it's incredibly important that any candidate is aware of them going into the essay. Students often struggle most with AO2. Given that it's weighted at 35%, this can often hamstring their essay. Making sure that students know what is expected of them and understand how to adapt their answers to the criteria is the best way to turn an A into an A\*.

	AO1	AO2	AO3	AO4
Weighting	35%	35%	20%	10%

## THE ANSWER

1 In Act 3 scene 2 Shakespeare uses imagery to explore the idea that Macbeth  
2 loses control. A quote to show this is 'And make our faces vizards to our hearts'.  
3 This tells us that Macbeth is nervous of what he has done. He is afraid that if  
4 anyone sees his heart it will be dark and soulless but to hide it they have to put  
5 on a dangerous face. The key word in this quote is "vizards". This shows that their  
6 faces are masks of their real person. The person they are to other people is only  
7 an act because behind that mask is a cruel person. This shows the audience that  
8 Macbeth is a horrible person and has to be a complete new personality just to be  
9 King. In Jacobean times this would have been seen as a terrible act. The King was  
10 considered like a God and to kill him would be unheard of. The audience back  
11 then would see his treachery and betrayal and be shocked at what lengths he  
12 would go to, to become King.  
13 Shakespeare uses the imagery to show the madness in Macbeth coming through.  
14 When Macbeth says 'O full of Scorpions is my mind'. It creates an image of his

**Lines 1-2.** AO1: Ideally, you should situate this answer within the context of the play. Examining the literary effects of the words Shakespeare uses is a great start but remember to pay attention to the explicit and implicit meanings of the paragraph as well. Keep the question in mind. This scene is the first time we see Macbeth champion violence rather than his wife. Furthermore, he decides to kill his best friend. If you specify this, you can make your answer a lot more convincing. It's important to show how Macbeth has started to convince himself that violence begets violence early. Writing a good and well-structured introduction is essential to an excellent essay; start as you mean to go on. AO2: What kind of imagery do you think this might be? Does the quote you've chosen seem a bit more like a metaphor?

**Line 2.** AO1: Great use of a very important quote!

**Line 3.** AO4: Consider using more forceful words, like 'paranoid', to make your point more vivid.

**Lines 5-9.** AO1: Although identifying key terms is useful, this isn't quite what Macbeth says. His wife asks him to put on a brave and jovial face to his guests. Bear in mind that if he were worried about people perceiving his dark and soulless heart, it would be best not to put on a "dangerous face". This quotation you have used better represents the inner turmoil Macbeth is experiencing and makes a compelling point about how this contributes to his mental decline. Try to put yourself in Macbeth's shoes. It's difficult to feel one way and act in another. When analysing unfamiliar language, you're often best served when looking at motivational consistency. Your point is a good one, but it can be better put with different textual evidence, for example, you can show Macbeth is dangerous and cruel by the quote: "Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill". AO4: Some of the phrasing in this passage is a bit clunky. See if there are any places where you might be able to put your point more succinctly.

**Lines 9-12.** AO3: This is a good contextual link and could be made even stronger by a reference to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 – a failed assassination attempt on the Scottish James VI/I. Good job to link the context to audience response.

**PARAGRAPH 1:** Overall, while this paragraph quotes effectively (AO1) and intelligently invokes the context of Macbeth (AO3), it could be made a bit stronger with a better analysis of the text (AO1). The analysis of the quote is a bit wanting as the point you're making is not completely faithful to the quote you have chosen. Additionally, while you have talked about imagery, you haven't discussed any of the images Shakespeare uses (AO2). Paying attention to the literary effects of words in addition to what they mean would greatly boost your score.

**Lines 13-15.** AO1: A very well-selected quote. AO2: A good identification of a literary device and adroit usage of the appropriate term that could be made stronger still by specifying what type of imagery it is. The analysis you have provided is satisfactory; though it could be made better if you demonstrate how the scorpion stings make his pain seem visceral and physical, rather than solely mental.

15 mind being confused and muddled up with the events going on that time. The  
16 quote shows the audience that Macbeth's mind is no longer sane and that killing  
17 Duncan has affected him mentally. The key word in this quote is 'scorpions'  
18 because it suggests his mind has loads of ideas running around everywhere and  
19 that he has lost control of himself and can't straighten things out from right to  
20 wrong. Furthermore this would have affected a Jacobean audience because  
21 Macbeth is getting mad and Kings at the same time can go mad with power and  
22 forget about the meaning of King.

23 Thirdly Shakespeare uses deception to show that Macbeth is getting mad with  
24 power he says 'to be thus is nothing but to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo  
25 stick deep'. Macbeth is plotting to kill Banquo purely because of his own fear in  
26 Banquo. The quote shows the audience that Macbeth just cares about being King  
27 and that he will do whatever it takes to defeat all opponents from the play. The  
28 audience see that the witches prophecy have started to get to him and that he is  
29 worried about Banquo's children becoming King. We know that he is troubled by  
30 this because he says, 'thou has placed on me a fruitless crown'. He is shaken up

**Lines 17-20.** AO1: A good identification of the key term in the quotation, but one that doesn't quite capture exactly what the term does. The scorpions cause Macbeth pain, it's their number that is out of control. The word that better represents your point within the quotation is "full". AO2: However, this is a commendable effort to analyse the literary effects of the chosen quote and it is clear that you do understand what Shakespeare was trying to evoke.

**Lines 20-22.** AO3: This is a good identification of the wider literary context but could be made better by pointing out the civil unrest that characterised the Jacobean period. You could link this to audience's reactions by pointing out how Shakespeare's play could have encouraged them to pay attention to the ill consequences which follow from an attempt to depose the king. If you'd like some supplementary reading that talks more about this, try 'Tyrant' by Stephen Greenblatt.

**PARAGRAPH 2:** Overall this paragraph makes good use of quotation (AO1) and makes a decent effort at trying to analyse literary effects (AO2). There are places where the interpretation could be more nuanced (AO1, 2) and scope for the historical context of the play to be further developed (AO3). However, it is still a strong paragraph.

**Lines 23-27.** AO3: A good quote that demonstrates knowledge of the wider text. AO2: However, I am not quite convinced that Shakespeare himself is using deception. It would be better to ascribe deception to Macbeth. If you would like to use a literary term to demonstrate how Shakespeare shows Macbeth's gradual loss of control, the word 'soliloquy' would work here, as this quotation is part of an address to the audience to reveal Macbeth's inner state without deception. If you want to show 'deception', rather than paranoia as you have done here, it might be better to refer to Macbeth and Banquo's conversation than to Macbeth's soliloquy. Still, the attempt to analyse the quotation is broadly successful so well done on that front. AO1: Still, you could bolster this further by pointing to Macbeth's belief that a precarious king is no king at all to demonstrate his paranoia. AO4: It is also worth highlighting that you have moved out of the extract and into another part of the play.

**Lines 28-29.** AO3: Referencing the witches prophecy makes for a relevant and good link to the wider text. Well done!

**Line 30.** AO1: Great use of quotation that links well with the previous statement!

31 by this and we can see in both quotes he is becoming mad with power. The key  
32 word is the quote is 'thus' because Shakespeare uses this word for it to mean  
33 King. He says there is no point being King if you are not safely King. This tells us  
34 he is losing his mind and overthinking everything believing that everyone is  
35 against him. At the time of Shakespeare this would be a very unknown thing to  
36 happen. A King killing his own soldier even his own friend. This really emphasises  
37 how mad Macbeth has gone and what lengths he will go to become safely King.  
38 Lastly Shakespeare uses the [illegible] of a metaphor to show the changing  
39 relationship of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. He says 'Be innocent of the  
40 knowledge dearest chuck', this quote shows the audience that the relationship  
41 has changed. Before when Macbeth was planning to kill Duncan it was Lady  
42 Macbeth who encouraged him to do the deed. Now Macbeth is dominating telling  
43 her what to do and not telling her everything. The key word is 'chuck'. This tells  
44 us that Macbeth is downgrading her as a lesser person than he is. It marks it if  
45 Lady Macbeth isn't as strong and a weaker person. At the time of this play this  
46 wouldn't of been as big of a deal because women were rated as the maid or the

**Line 32.** AO1: An excellent selection of a key term and a commendable analysis of its impact. AO4: However, structurally this could be improved by placing this sentence earlier; such that it is immediately after your selected quote in the topic sentence.

**Lines 35-36.** AO3: This is a good link to the historical context of the work. AO4: However, this is sentential redundancy. It would be better to specify what the unknown thing is from the outset.

**PARAGRAPH 3:** This is, in general, a good paragraph. However, you would have been better served by incorporating these quotes into your analysis of the quotes from the extract. The troubles associated with a 'fruitless crown' link well with the scorpions in Macbeth's mind, and 'vizards' link well to Macbeth's duplicity in his conversation with Banquo shortly before the soliloquy you quote from (AO1).

**Lines 39-40.** AO1: A relevant quotation to the point you've made. Good stuff!

**Lines 40-43.** AO3: This is an astute point that demonstrates knowledge about the wider text. AO1: It also demonstrates an understanding of the text through the use of language.

**Line 43-44.** AO1: An excellent identification of a key term. AO2: However, You could improve this point by talking about the type of term "chuck" is; that is, a term of endearment. In Shakespeare's day, chuck meant chicken. By using a zoomorphic term (a specific kind of metaphor), Macbeth deprives Lady Macbeth of her personhood.

**Lines 45-48.** AO3: While this is true and is a good invocation of the historical context of the text, Lady Macbeth hardly fits the archetype of the "normal woman" for the majority of the play. Think about this in the context of the question. This passage is portrayed as an instance where Macbeth's relationship with his wife is unravelling. Shakespearean female characters were quite unlike the archetypal image of women at the time. Macbeth reverting to society's type would be an excellent illustration of Macbeth losing control over himself. When you use the historical context in which a work is written, always remember to think about how it applies to the greater narrative arc of the character.

47 cook or the assistant of their husband. It was not a unorthodox sight to see a man  
48 be the dominant force in the relationship.  
49 Overall I think that in Act 3 the power that Macbeth takes hold as takes over him  
50 and his relationship. It changes his life making him always look over his shoulder.

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## THE FEEDBACK

**Areas of Excellence:** This essay demonstrates your critical skills quite well so far as identifying the themes and explicit meanings of the wider text are concerned. You have also quoted effectively to tease these points out (A01). Your knowledge of the historical context is excellent (A03). Your sentence construction and use of language is, for the most part, very good (A04).

**Areas for improvement:** Although your quotation is a merit as far as identifying the general points you wish to illustrate, sometimes your analysis of the meanings of the quotes themselves is wanting. This could be improved by paying greater attention to the context in which they the statements you choose are located

**PARAGRAPH 4:** This is a paragraph that starts strong and makes an astute observation about the reversal of the power dynamic between Macbeth and his wife. It would have been quite interesting had you used the historical context in a way that better teased out how the audience might have responded. If they saw women as subservient, would this perhaps have caused them to sympathise with Macbeth – even though he is recommending killing and Lady Macbeth caution? Might they have felt conflicted about putting the woman in her “rightful” place and knowing that she was right?

**Lines 49–50:** AO4: This sentence is quite confused. AO1: However, it does illustrate a wider theme in the extract: the effect of power on corruption. Still, you have not dedicated enough of this essay to the analysis of this concept so as to justify the statement. This is why it's important to plan your essay well by first identifying the specific theme you wish to explore.

**Lines 50:** AO1: It is true that Macbeth always looks over his shoulder after this point in the text, but it is interesting to answer the question of why he looks over his shoulder. Is it because the threats he perceives are real or imaginary? If the answer is the latter, then think about how this might relate to the general theme you have identified and with the prompt of this essay.

**PARAGRAPH 5:** This conclusion is a little bit abrupt. Furthermore, the frequency of grammatical mistakes in the last few lines of this essay suggests that you might have ran low on time. It is important to make sure you have a good plan in mind to counteract this; still, practice makes perfect and with a few more essays I'm sure we'll be able to have you in a place where this is no longer an issue.

(A01). Another area in which you could stand to improve is identifying specific literary devices and talking about their effects. This is something that the essay seems to lack throughout (A02). Additionally, it is worth incorporating your choice of quotations from outside the given extract into your responses to what is contained in the extract. This will help make your points more vivid. Although you have demonstrated a great deal of historical knowledge, a bit more nuance in your analysis of it and how it relates to the text could help your answer quite a bit (A03).

**Overall grade:** I would think that this essay would be a safe band 4 response.

Good job, but I know that you're capable of even better! With a little more planning, attention to detail, and understanding of the use and effects of literary terms we can skip band 5 and jump straight to 6.

**Strategies:** We can improve your responses to questions like this in two main ways. The first is by doing a class on how to do a guided close analysis so that you become more adept at identifying literary devices and their effects and to

help you identify the meanings of specific phrases and sentences in the context in which they are written. The second is by discussing how to appropriately plan and structure an essay. This will help you better answer the question and incorporate your excellent understanding of the wider text into your response to a specific extract. It is important to make the motivation behind your argument clear from the outset so you can limit the open possibilities which you can refer to in a text to make a good argument under the constraints of limited time and space. As always, if you have any questions about my feedback, do let me know.