



5 hours in... A-Level English Literature

Research shows that the most successful students (i.e. those that make the most progress and get the highest grades) are doing between 20 and 25 hours of independent study per week by the end of Year 13. That may seem a lot, but it's something that you would build up to over the course of your A-Levels. In Year 12, we're talking something more like 15 hours per week. This equates to roughly 5 hours of independent study per A-Level per subject.

Remember that your independent study is divided into three types – **Consolidation, Reactive and Proactive**. How this is divided may vary from week to week or between subjects but one approach could be:

Consolidation - 45mins

Straight after a lesson, or that evening / the following day you should reread your notes, talk a topic through with somebody, write summaries, mindmaps, flashcards e.g. for equations, definitions, facts you need to recall etc. Other examples include the following:

- Produce a chapter/scene summary in 50-100 words, selecting only the key information.
- Compile a list of key themes in your text. Probably your teacher will have a list of these if you are stuck. Either create a mind map tracing a single theme across a chapter/poem/scene or across multiple chapters. If you are reading through a text for the first time perhaps you could add to your mind-map as you read the text. If you are comparing texts then create a comparative mind map or venn diagram.
- Another way of presenting the same material is by compiling a tracker table. Columns could be headed with a number of different themes and the rows the individual chapters or scenes. Ask your teacher for a template grid if you want.
- Once you have traced key themes in the text, you can do the same for key characters.
- Choose a motif/symbol/image and trace how a writer uses it within a text.
- Identify key quotations (lots of revision guides and websites can help you compile these). Do some close word level analysis and see if you can identify three possible interpretations for each quotation.
- Compile a list of key terminology and definitions, then test yourself.
- Re-read your set text or portions of it eg reviewing the chapter/poem/scene you have just read in class.
- Annotate a portion of your set text. Colour coding, highlighters and post it notes are useful at this point.
- Consider what questions would you like to ask about the section you have just studied or are about to study – phrase this as a question to then find the answer to through research or extended writing.
- Also review any assessed work that has been returned – is there any **DIRT** work to do?
- Make sure you have a copy of up to date mark schemes and recent examiner reports.
- Use the internet to research relevant contexts: social, cultural, historical, biographical, and literary.
- Restrict yourself to 15 minute bursts of reading research about a text on the internet before you stop and try to write down what you remember of your reading.

Reactive – 3hrs

This is your 'homework'. Each of your teachers should give you at least 1 hours' worth of homework each week. This could be linked to upcoming exams, preparation work for coursework or coursework that is currently being completed. This could include the following:

- If you can't find a past question there that you want to do then it is quite easy to make up your own versions e.g. How does X present the theme of Y in text Z? or Compare how writers A and B present the theme/idea of X in texts Y and Z. In no time you will be coming up with your own hypothetical questions.
- Mind map ideas for an essay then turn them into a paragraph plan.

- Write essays in timed conditions. Move from typed responses with are easy to edit and adapt as you write, to handwritten essays to re-create exam conditions.
- Practise writing a perfect paragraph.
- Practise weaving context into a paragraph
- Practise devising topic sentences in response to an exam question
- Practise comparing texts WITHIN a paragraph
- Practise weaving a response to other critical arguments into your response.
- Practise devising a thesis for an essay response
- Use exam board websites to look up past questions
- Do some critical wider reading through accessing JSTOR, the EMag archives or the National Theatre Collection from DramaOnline (your teacher will help you access these sites)

If you find this takes more than 1 hour, that's fine, you can take this from the proactive phase (not from the consolidation phase though). Equally, if you find you finish your reactive work quickly, spend more time on your proactive work.

Proactive – 1hr 15mins

This is the section that will broaden and deepen your overall understanding of the subject you are studying. It will not necessarily involve work that has been set by your teacher, but instead it is about you doing the extra practice questions, reading articles, watching videos, TED talks etc. In English Literature, this might contain some of the following:

- Read AHEAD – the next chapter, poem, scene! Devise 3 questions you would like to ask about it next lesson. Prepare for your next lesson through reading, annotating, researching.
- Practise annotating an unseen poem – you can use poems from your anthology that are not on the prescribed list
- Complete a set of practice past paper questions – available from the exam board website (1 hour)
- Use Seneca Learning to complete and add to class notes (30 minutes)
- Use the specification checklist or assignment brief to evaluate your understanding (10 mins)
- Answer questions from your revision guide (30 mins)
- Creation of knowledge organisers (1 hour)
- “Read, Cover, Write and Check” sections of Knowledge organisers (30 mins)
- Watch a TED talk on a relevant topic (20 mins)
- Find a podcast or video that offers another critical reading of your text.
- Read another text by the same author.

Useful links

Some of the following articles are accessed through Sheldon's account with the EMC, but they are hyperlinked below for teacher and student use; details for how to access them can be disclosed when needed.

The following schedule is designed to be used throughout Year 12 to consolidate the learning in line with the curriculum delivery, however it could be used by Y13 students to review their notes a year later.

Term 1 Week 1-2	W/C 2/9/24	Watch this video on effective note-taking (known as the Cornell method), then try using it to make notes on this CrashCourse video on 'The Handmaid's Tale'.
Term 1 Week 3-4	W/C 16/9/24	Watch this video , then make a fact file on the following areas of 'A Streetcar Named Desire' and its context: Tennessee Williams and his inspiration, the Southern Gothic genre and Plastic Theatre
Term 1 Week 5-6	W/C 30/9/24	Make notes on A Level student Katy Murr's ' Fragmenting The Whole: The Narrative Inventiveness of 'The Handmaid's Tale' ', paying particular focus to how she argues Atwood uses language to tell a new kind of dystopian story.

Term 1 Week 7-8	W/C 14/10/24	Make notes on Salima Abbasi Freeman's 'New Orleans in 'A Streetcar Named Desire': its significance and symbolism' , then answer the following question: What is the significance of the play's setting? (500 words)
Half Term		
Term 2 Week 1-2	W/C 4/11/24	Watch this clip of Atwood, then research Nicolae Ceausescu, the oppression of women in Romania and Decree 770. Make a fact file on this research and write a paragraph to explain why it is relevant to our study of science and society in 'The Handmaid's Tale' (500 words).
Term 2 Week 3-4	W/C 18/11/24	Makes notes on Takeshi Sakai's essay 'Stanley's Attitudes in 'A Streetcar Named Desire' , playing particular focus to how Williams juxtaposes Blanche and Stanley as characters in the exposition of the play.
Term 2 Week 5-6	W/C 2/11/24	Research the 'Religious Right' of the 1980s, read the introduction to Colette Tennant's 'The Handmaid's Tale: A Brief Guide' and make notes on how religion and theonomic control is evident in the novel
Term 2 Week 7-8	W/C 16/11/24	Make notes on Rebecca Cole's 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty': A Streetcar Named Desire' then answer the following question: To what extent does Cole argue that 'A Streetcar Named Desire' establishes Blanche as a character whose downfall is inevitable?' (500 words)
Christmas Holidays		
Term 3 Week 1-2	W/C 6/1/25	Review your class notes on 'Eat Me' and 'Chainsaw Versus The Pampas Grass' , then write an answer to the following question: Compare the ways both poets present ideas about human control (600 words)
Term 3 Week 3-4	W/C 20/1/25	Make notes on both Part 1 and Part 2 of this CrashCourse series on the novel, focusing especially on its relevance to science and society.
Term 3 Week 5-6	W/C 3/2/25	Make notes on teacher Gabi Reigh's 'Costume in 'A Streetcar Named Desire' , then create a visual revision resource which outlines Williams' use of costuming to signify important aspect of character
Half Term		
Term 4 Week 1-2	W/C 24/2/25	Review your class notes on 'To My Nine-Year-Old Self' and 'Material' , then write an answer to the following question: Compare the ways both poets present nostalgia (600 words)
Term 4 Week 3-4	W/C 10/3/25	Read Haley C. Ochs' essay on 'Frankenstein in the Twenty-First Century' and make notes on how ideas about science and society in the 19 th century informed Shelley's writing of this novel.
Term 4 Week 5-6	W/C 24/3/25	Read Haley C. Ochs' essay on 'Frankenstein in the Twenty-First Century' and make notes on how ideas about science and society in the 19 th century informed Shelley's writing of this novel.
Easter Holidays		
Term 5 Week 1-2	W/C 21/4/25	Make notes on Judy Simons' 'Frankenstein: Order, Narrative and Chaos' and answer the following question: How does Simons suppose Shelley structures the novel in such a way that it reflects the creation of Victor's monster itself?' (500 words)
Term 5 Week 5-6	W/C 5/5/25	Review your class notes on 'History' and 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' , then write an answer to the following question: Compare the ways both poets present the importance of place (600 words)

Term 5 Week 7-8	W/C 19/5/25	Make notes on this EMC article on ‘A Masterclass in the Gothic’ and answer the following question: To what extent do you agree that Shelley portrays science itself as a monster in ‘Frankenstein’? <i>(500 words)</i>
Half Term		
Term 6 Week 1-2	W/C 9/6/25	Review your class notes on ‘Guiseppe’ and ‘Genetics’ , then write an answer to the following question: Compare the ways both poets present conflict <i>(600 words)</i>
Term 6 Week 3-4	W/C 23/6/25	Make notes on the preface of ‘Betty T. Bennett’s ‘Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An Introduction’ and write an answer to following question: What the critic supposes is the importance of Mary Shelley’s works through time? <i>(200 words)</i>
Term 6 Week 5-6	W/C 7/7/25	Review your class notes on ‘Look We Have Coming To Dover!’ and ‘Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn’ , then write an answer to the following question: Compare the ways both poets present personal or national identities <i>(600 words)</i>
Summer Holidays		