

Section 1

#1: Opening paragraph (from "The cafe was a bright shelter..." to "...tapped its steady rhythm on the glass.")

Strengths:

- Your sensory details bring the cafe to life effectively. The steam clouding the windows and the mix of coffee and damp coat smells help readers feel like they're actually there.
- The contrast between the cosy cafe and the storm outside creates a strong mood right from the start.

Weak character introduction → Whilst you paint a vivid picture of the cafe itself, you don't introduce any characters in this opening paragraph. This means readers spend time learning about the setting without meeting anyone to care about yet. Because the rest of your piece focuses on three specific people, starting with at least one character would help readers connect more quickly. For example, you could show Mr Harris already sitting by the window as the rain begins, or Ella entering the cafe, which would give readers someone to follow whilst also experiencing the atmosphere.

Exemplar: *The cafe was a bright shelter from the storm outside, where Mr Harris had already claimed his usual seat by the window, watching the rain blur the street into grey.*

#2: Character descriptions (from "By the window sat Mr. Harris..." to "...trying not to drop her heavy schoolbag.")

Strengths:

- You've created three distinct characters with clear backgrounds. Each person feels different from the others—a retired sailor, a struggling artist, and a worried student.
- The small physical details like Naomi's pencil-marked fingers and Mr Harris sitting upright help readers picture each person.

Surface-level character presentation → Your character descriptions tell us facts about who these people are, but they don't show us much about their personalities through their actions. You write

"Mr. Harris, an old sailor who had travelled across the world" and "Naomi sat with a sketchbook open. She was an artist who found it hard to sell her paintings." These are statements that simply inform readers rather than letting them discover these things naturally. Instead of announcing that Mr Harris was a sailor, you could show his weathered hands holding the newspaper or describe how he studies the storm clouds with an experienced eye. Rather than stating that Naomi struggles to sell her art, you could show her sketching the same corner of the cafe for the third time, or hesitating before adding another line.

Exemplar: *By the window sat Mr Harris, his weathered hands steady on the newspaper despite the storm rattling the glass—hands that had once gripped ship wheels through far worse weather.*

#3: The crash scene (from "Suddenly, a barista tripped..." to "...carrying their own storms inside.")

Strengths:

- You've chosen a good moment to connect your three characters. The crash happens to all of them at once, which demonstrates your main theme effectively.
- The final line about "carrying their own storms inside" ties back nicely to the weather outside.

Underdeveloped contrast → Whilst you show that each character reacts differently to the crash, the reactions feel quite simple and don't reveal much depth. Ella laughs nervously, Naomi gasps, and Mr Harris barely moves—but these are fairly predictable responses that don't teach us anything new about them. You've set up that Ella worries about her studies, Naomi doubts her art will sell, and Mr Harris remembers the sea, yet none of these inner struggles connect to how they react to the crash. For instance, why might Ella's study worries make her laugh nervously at a breaking sound? Could Naomi's reaction show something about her artist's eye or her lack of confidence? Might Mr Harris's calm response reveal something deeper about his experiences at sea? The phrase "as if the sound reminded him of something familiar" hints at this but doesn't explore it.

Exemplar: *Mr Harris barely moved, his eyes distant—he'd heard far worse than shattering crockery when cargo broke loose in a typhoon, and he'd learnt long ago that panic never helped anyone.*

■ Your piece demonstrates a clear understanding of how to create atmosphere and introduce a theme about people experiencing the same moment differently. The café setting works well as a contained space where these three lives can briefly intersect, and your sensory details in the opening help readers feel present in that space. However, the writing would become much stronger if you developed your characters through showing rather than telling. Right now, you're explaining who people are and what they feel instead of letting readers discover these things through actions, dialogue, and smaller details. Additionally, your piece could explore deeper connections between the characters' inner struggles and their outward behaviour. When Ella bumps the table or when the tray crashes, these moments are opportunities to reveal character, but currently the reactions feel somewhat generic. Consider taking your second paragraph and rewriting it so that readers learn about Mr Harris, Naomi, and Ella through what they do and how they interact with the café space, rather than through direct statements about their backgrounds. Also, look at your final paragraph about the crash—think about how each character's personal "storm" might specifically influence their reaction to that sudden noise. What would someone worried about studies notice that an artist wouldn't? How would years at sea change what a loud crash means to someone? These specific connections will make your theme about shared experiences and private struggles feel more meaningful and less like a stated idea.

Overall Score: 41/50

Section 2

#1 The café was a bright shelter from the storm outside. Steam clouded the windows, turning the street into a blur of grey. The smell of fresh coffee filled the air, mixed with the damp scent of wet coats. People chatted in cheerful voices, chairs scraped across the floor, and the rain outside tapped its steady rhythm on the glass.

~~By the window sat Mr. Harris, an old sailor who had travelled across the world. Even though he had retired long ago, he still sat upright, as if the chair were part of a ship. Near the counter, Naomi sat with a sketchbook open. She was an artist who found it hard to sell her paintings. Her fingers were dark with pencil marks, and she kept her head low as she drew. At the same time, Ella pushed her way through the door, shaking rain from her jacket and trying not to drop her heavy schoolbag.~~ [#2 By the window sat Mr Harris, his weathered hands folding the newspaper with practised precision, his

posture still naval-straight despite years ashore. Near the counter, Naomi hunched over her sketchbook, her fingers smudged with graphite as she sketched and re-sketched the same café corner, never quite satisfied. At that moment, Ella pushed her way through the door, shaking rain from her jacket whilst juggling her heavy schoolbag, already mentally calculating how many assignments she'd left undone.]

As Ella squeezed past Naomi's chair, her bag brushed the sketchbook. "Sorry," she whispered quickly. Naomi gave a small, gentle smile and nodded without speaking. Mr Harris lowered his newspaper for a second, his brow wrinkled at the noise. Then he returned to reading, pretending not to notice. For a short moment, all three were linked together by that tiny bump.

But each had their own thoughts. Ella worried she would never catch up with her studies. Naomi wondered if anyone would ever want to buy her art. Mr Harris, staring out at the storm, remembered long nights at sea, the waves crashing louder than the ~~café's~~ [café's] noise.

~~Suddenly, a barista tripped. A tray of mugs crashed onto the floor. Ella jumped, letting out a nervous laugh. Naomi gasped, her pencil sliding across the page. Mr. Harris barely moved, only nodding calmly, as if the sound reminded him of something familiar.~~ [#3 Suddenly, a barista tripped. A tray of mugs crashed onto the floor. Ella jumped, letting out a nervous laugh—the kind that escapes when everything feels overwhelming and one more thing breaking seems almost funny. Naomi gasped, her pencil sliding across the page, ruining the line she'd spent ten minutes perfecting. Mr Harris barely moved, his expression unchanged—he'd heard far worse than shattering crockery when cargo broke loose in typhoons, and he'd learnt long ago that panic never mended anything.]

For one instant, the three of them shared the same event. Yet each felt it differently, carrying their own storms inside.