

MARKER'S SECRET SHOPPING LIST



An Examiner Marking Papers with Red Pen

*What Selective & OC Markers Secretly Tick Off (But Never Tell
You)*

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HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Who this is for

Year 3–6 students preparing for:

- OC & Selective writing tasks
- Scholarships and school writing competitions

What this is

Markers are not "going with their feelings." They are quietly ticking off the same features over and over:

Ideas • Structure • Sentence control • Vocabulary • Paragraphing • Editing • Exam behaviour

This checklist turns that invisible marking guide into a simple shopping list your child can pack into every piece of writing.



3-Step "Before You Submit" Routine

1. Write fast first.

Don't worry about perfection. Get the story/argument down in 20–25 minutes.

2. Grab the Shopping List.

Spend 5–10 minutes going through each section:

- Tick  what's there
- Circle  what's missing

3. Upgrade 3 things only.

In the last 5–10 minutes, fix:

- 1× structure issue
- 1× sentence / vocab issue
- 1× edit / spelling issue

That alone can push a script from average → competitive.

BIG PICTURE: WHAT MARKERS LOOK FOR FIRST (SCAN IN 10 SECONDS)

When a marker picks up your child's writing, they silently ask:

- "Is this clear to follow?"
- "Is this controlling the reader?"
- "Is the language precise and confident?"

Use this quick scan before the detailed checklist:

Big-Picture Shopping List

☐ **Clear response to the prompt**

Marker lens: "Did they actually answer the question?"

Kid translation: "Would a stranger know what the task was just from my writing?"

☐ **Strong beginning and ending**

Opening sets up the situation / argument

Ending doesn't just stop – it wraps up the idea or leaves a clear message.

☐ **Stays on one main idea**

No random side stories

Every paragraph links back to the main problem / main argument.

☐ **Easy to follow structure**

Narrative: clear beginning → build-up → key moment → resolution

Persuasive: clear introduction → 2–3 body reasons → conclusion.

☐ **Confident "voice"**

Sounds like a real person talking to the reader, not a robot.

No "I am writing to tell you..." style.

If you can tick 4 out of 5, you're already out of the "low band" danger zone.

NARRATIVE WRITING SHOPPING LIST

(Stories for Selective / OC / Scholarship)

1. Ideas & Content

☐ **One clear central problem / moment**

Marker lens: "Can I summarise this story in one sentence?"

Self-check: "Can I finish this sentence: This is a story about..."

☐ **High-stakes moment**

Something actually matters: a test, competition, big decision, risk, or relationship.

☐ **Show, don't tell**

At 3–4 key points, your child shows feelings through actions:

"My hands shook as I gripped the pen."

"Mum's eyebrows shot up."

☐ **Focused time frame**

Zoomed into minutes or hours, not a whole lifetime.

2. Structure & Control

☐ **Hook opening**

Starts with:

- A moment of action
- A line of dialogue
- Or a sharp thought (not weather, not "One day there was a boy...")

☐ **Logical sequence**

Events follow naturally: Before → Build-up → Peak moment →
Aftermath

☐ **Paragraphs = camera angles**

New paragraph for:

- New time
- New place
- New important action or thought.

☐ **Clean ending**

Doesn't say "The End".

Shows how the character changed or what they learnt.

3. Sentences & Vocabulary

☐ **Mix of sentence lengths**

Some short, punchy ones: "The clock ticked."

Some longer, descriptive ones.

☐ **Precise verbs, not boring ones**

"stomped, whispered, clenched, darted" > "went, said, did, got".

☐ **Sensory detail (at least 3 senses)**

Sight / Sound / Touch / Smell / Taste

Self-check: "Can I point to 3 spots where I used senses?"

☐ **No overloading with fancy words**

3–5 high-level words used correctly is enough.

Marker lens: "Do the words serve the story, or show off?"

4. Editing & Presentation

☐ **Capitals and full stops mostly correct**

☐ **Spelling on common words accurate** (because, friend, really, school...)

☐ **Handwriting/font easy to read**

☐ **Cross-outs are neat** (one line through, not scribbled fields of ink)

PERSUASIVE WRITING SHOPPING LIST

(Essays, speeches, opinion pieces)

1. Ideas & Argument

☐ **Clear position from the start**

Marker lens: "Do I know what they believe in the first 2–3 sentences?"

Example: "I strongly believe all primary schools should have a homework-free day each week."

☐ **2–3 strong reasons (not 10 weak ones)**

Each body paragraph = one big reason

Self-check: "Can I list my reasons as dot points?"

☐ **Reasons are specific, not vague**

"Homework causes stress that leads to sleep problems" better than
"Homework is bad."

☐ **Examples / mini-stories**

At least 1 example per reason:

- A mini-story
- A statistic (even if estimated)
- A "what if" scenario

2. Structure & Flow

☐ Intro with 3 parts

- Hook line
- Short background statement
- Clear position (I believe... / This essay will argue...)

☐ Body paragraphs follow TEEL / PEEL

- Topic sentence
- Explanation
- Example / evidence
- Link back to main argument

☐ Logical order of reasons

Plan: Medium reason → Stronger reason → Strongest reason last.

☐ Conclusion that doesn't repeat word-for-word

- Restates position
- Summarises key ideas
- Ends with a call to action or final thought.

3. Language Features Markers Love

☐ Rhetorical questions

"Do we really want exhausted children stumbling through class every morning?"

☐ Emotive language in key places

"exhausted", "overwhelmed", "thriving", "confident".

☐ **Connectives that show logic**

"Firstly, furthermore, however, therefore, as a result, on the other hand..."

☐ **Direct address to the reader**

"Imagine walking into class already tired."

"You might think homework is harmless, but..."

☐ **Repetition of key phrase**

A short slogan repeated 2–3 times:

"Homework-free Fridays are not a luxury; they are a necessity."

4. Editing & Exam Behaviour

☐ **No texting / slang language**

"gonna, wanna, u, lol, btw" = auto mark-down.

☐ **Check common homophones**

there/their/they're, your/you're, to/too/two.

☐ **Timing**

Leaves 3–5 minutes at the end to scan using this list.

ONE-PAGE "SECRET SHOPPING LIST"

(PRINTABLE)

A. Must-Haves (for ANY writing)

- ☐ I answered the question / prompt clearly.
- ☐ My writing has a clear beginning, middle, and ending.
- ☐ Each paragraph talks about one main idea.
- ☐ I used a mix of short and long sentences.
- ☐ I used at least 3 precise, powerful verbs.
- ☐ I used at least 3 senses somewhere in my writing.
- ☐ I checked capitals, full stops and spelling of common words.
- ☐ Someone else could read this easily and understand it without me explaining.

B. Narrative Extras

- ☐ The story has one main problem or moment.

☐ My opening hooks the reader (no "One day...").

☐ My ending shows what changed or what I learnt.

C. Persuasive Extras

☐ I clearly said what I believe in the first paragraph.

☐ I used 2–3 big reasons, each in its own paragraph.

☐ I used at least 1 example or mini-story for each reason.

☐ I ended with a strong, clear final message.