

# MARKER'S SECRET SHOPPING LIST

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*An Examiner Marking Papers with Red Pen*

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*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.