

# 11+ English Comprehension Tips

The English part of the the 11+ exam is one of the toughest bits. It takes a lot of thinking, writing and, of course, reading, and it can be tough to get all of it right or even to just know all of the words! To help you out, here are a few tips that we've put together based on our tutoring experience. If you have any of your own, let us know on Twitter @EnjoyEducation.

## **Read the questions before reading the text**

This is a question of taste and if you don't like doing it, then don't do it, but as a rule it's very helpful to read the questions before the text. This gives you an idea of what to look for when reading and if you read with the questions in mind, the relevant details stick out more.

## **If you don't understand a word, read around it**

Chances are there will be some vocabulary you just don't know. Don't worry! It happens and it's actually part of the test, although we do advise to regularly read far and wide to make sure your vocabulary range is as wide as it can be. What you need to do is to work out what the word probably means based on the context, on what else is going on. Try this 'As Sophie walked into the dark house, the door cracked open forebodingly.' Now you may not know the word 'forebodingly' but you can tell that this sentence feels scary and if you walked into a dark house with a creaky door, well that would make you afraid and worried. So here we could say that 'forebodingly' means something like 'worryingly'. Of course this becomes better with practice but don't let yourself get stumped by the one word.

## **Remember that the questions come in order**

Simple one, but question number 1 of 7 will be about the beginning of the text, question 3 about the middle and question 5 will be about the end. This is not a hard rule but a good guide if ever you are not sure where to find the answer in the text. The last couple of questions are usually more general and subjective, about the text as a whole rather than a specific bit.

## **Look at how many marks per question**

Always always always look at how many marks there are per question. If it's one mark, just saying the one thing is enough, if it's three you need to be saying three separate things AND backing your answers up with quotes and specific details from the text.

## **Have you said why?**

This is a simple idea but one that makes a huge difference. Take these two answers: 'The dragon was greedy' and 'the dragon was greedy because he wants all of the gold in the world'. They're not very much longer than the other, but of course the second one tells the examiner why you've given the answer you've given. For almost all questions, if you have not said why you are giving the answer you are giving, you are not giving a full answer. Which is a shame because, from my own experience, you often know why, you just have not thought to write it!

## **Question WARNING SIGNS**

If you see the phrase 'in your own words', 'with specific reference to the passage' or 'use evidence from the passage to support your answer', these are big Stop And Listen signs in the question. If you ignore these key phrases you'll quickly lose out on marks.

*'In your own words'*: rephrase the relevant bit of the passage without using its words. So if

the text says 'grumpy John was a magnificent footballer' don't put 'despite being grumpy, John was magnificent at football', put 'John was very good at football and bad tempered'. This is tougher than it sounds but try to think of how you would explain things to your friends. Or, to start with at home, use a thesaurus to fit other words that can replace those that are there.

*'With specific reference to the passage'* or *'use evidence from the passage to support your answer'*: Both of these mean you need to be precise when answering so it's not 'John is a bad person', it's 'John is a bad person because he stole a baby's lollipop in line 3 - "the baby cried as John took his sweet out of her tiny hand"'. This means you must either quote, as in the given example, or use very specific detail from the passage such as exactly what a character does or looks like and what that means.

### **Remember P-E-E**

When answering trying to follow the Point, Example, Explanation format (note for parents: what this format is called varies, another common for is Point, Proof, Analysis or PPA). So your Point is what you want to say ('Snow White is brave'), your Example is something from the text that backs up your point ("Snow White stood her ground, staring the dragon straight in the eyes.") and your Explanation explains what your example means and why you're using it ('You have to be very brave to not run away from a dragon and to stand up to one').