

What characterises A* students in English?

Reading

Feature	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A confidence in analysing language 	<i>The author employs a style that surprises the reader. Her use of words like “quite” and “almost” suggests that she is taking a detached and analytical approach to hunting: it is as if she does not want to lower herself to their level. The fact that she addresses the reader as ‘you’ draws us in to the world of the text and provokes our interest ...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding of very short, well-selected quotations 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on language – eg structure, sentences, words 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of register and audience 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light-touch use of technical terms rather than demonstrating a tick-list mentality 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes tentative rather than firm statements – exploring rather than stating ideas 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relishes the vocabulary of a text and teases out the associations of words 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links ideas to prior reading 	

Writing

Feature	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to write impersonally, clearly and securely, with impressive accuracy 	<i>In life, we do big things and little things. Little things include making tea, cleaning out the guinea-pigs, or visiting Grandma. But it's the big things that get the attention, which people focus on, which we're told in articles and books and endless assemblies are things that define us, that make us who we are: big things like World Challenge expeditions to exotic places.</i> <i>Personally, I'm not convinced that the big things are that much more important than the little things. Little things matter a lot.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands that punctuation is not an after-thought but integral to thinking 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will use semi-colons to separated linked or contrasting clauses, not the comma splice; and commas for parenthesis 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will have a mixture of precision and elegance in writing, with syntactic rhythms which demonstrate a familiarity with good prose style 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will understand and demonstrate the way writers sometimes clarify and sometimes mystify 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will have lexical variety that avoids repetition, including adept deployment of pronouns 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands the power of simplicity when juxtaposed with complexity (rather than complicatedness) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will write with fluency and panache, and a sense of personal voice and commitment 	

There's probably other stuff too. To achieve this, these students read a lot and write a lot and, when reading and writing, are aware of the effects they are seeing and creating. They don't just 'do' these things: they consciously do them.

Geoff Barton,
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