

Macrat's "How To" series: *To complete a contextual or essay question?*

How do you decide whether to complete a contextual question or essay question in your literature exam?

You need to take a few minutes to read through the questions so that you can make a wise decision. Don't panic if you notice that others around you are already writing down answers.

With your knowledge of the text and characters, you should be able to make a fairly accurate assessment of how many of the contextual questions you will be able to answer. Similarly, you can decide whether you would be able to find enough material for the focus of the essay question.

Generally, you know where your strengths lie:

- ✓ If you can write well and can formulate and support arguments, go for the essay.
- ✓ If you are not confident about writing and supporting an argument, go for the contextual question.
- ✓ If you are not sure where your strengths lie, ask your teacher for his/her opinion and be guided by this.

What happens if both questions frighten you?

If you are totally daunted by the first question in the exam paper, leave 3-4 pages blank and continue with other questions. You can return to the question once your brain has started ticking over and what you know starts coming back to you more readily.

But, once you have to decide, be confident that your background knowledge of the plot, characters and themes will support you.

Good luck!



If you want to practise your contextual question answering skills, you can either use one of Macrat's study manuals, or look at our Literature Resource Series which offers essay and contextual questions with memos (selected texts):

<https://www.digital.macrat.co.za/product-category/pdf-mini-resource-packs/literature/>