

Improving Attendance, Motivation and Engagement in GCSE English Resit Lessons

Important note

This learning resource was developed through funding provided by the Department for Education under the English and maths grant. Funding for the project ended on 31 August 2026. This resource is being retained as an archive for reference and professional learning purposes. The content is no longer being actively reviewed, updated, or maintained. Users should ensure they refer to the latest statutory guidance, policy and sector requirements before relying on any information contained within these materials. The views and content presented are those of the original authors at the time of publication and should not be taken as current Department for Education policy unless supported by current official guidance. Where indicated, Crown copyright material is reused under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

Course details

Title of content	Improving Attendance, Motivation and Engagement in GCSE English Resit Lessons
Learning objectives	• Identify key barriers to engagement in GCSE English and how they manifest in learners • Consider how to design dynamic English lessons that go beyond exam-focused repetition.
Course description	In this course, you'll explore how to support learners who are resitting GCSE English. You'll identify barriers to learning and consider how to design dynamic, engaging lessons. (This course is part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.)
Who's this course for?	Educators working with learners who are resitting GCSE English

Course content

Module 1: An introduction to engaging learners in English

Lesson: Welcome and introduction

Page: Welcome to the course

Welcome to 'Improving Attendance, Motivation and Engagement in GCSE English Resit Lessons'

This short on-demand course was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and developed by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF).

It's part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.

What will you cover?

'Improving Attendance, Motivation and Engagement in GCSE English Resit Lessons' is all about supporting learners who are resitting GCSE English.

The course will provide bitesize advice and helpful links.

You should meet the following learning objectives:

- Identify key barriers to engagement in GCSE English and how they manifest in learners
- Consider how to design dynamic English lessons that go beyond exam-focused repetition.

As you move through the course and discover new information, ideas and perspectives, you can refer to these objectives and check your progress against them.

Resources and media

The resources in this self-directed resource are available to use under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#) except where otherwise stated.

Thanks are extended to everyone who took part in videos, audio clips and/or written case studies. (Please note: names and job titles were correct at the time of production – but some may have changed since then.)

Lesson: What's happening in this module?

Page: Welcome to Module 1

Welcome to Module 1

This module introduces the core challenge: how to re-engage learners who feel English is irrelevant or unachievable.

You'll explore:

- barriers to engaging with English
- the difference between TIRED and ALIVE English delivery
- how to begin planning for engagement with intention and creativity
- the role of gamification and digital tools in boosting motivation
- the importance of linking vocational learning to English learning.

Lesson: Barriers and approaches

Page: Barriers to engaging learners

Learners who are resitting GCSE English often arrive with low confidence, negative prior experiences and a sense that they have 'failed'.

Repeated exposure to exam-style questions can reinforce these feelings, leading to disengagement and poor attendance.

Disengagement is rarely a personal failing. It often stems from the following.

- **Dispositional barriers**
These can include low self-esteem, a fixed mindset and a fear of failure.
- **Situational barriers**
These can include financial stress, caring responsibilities and housing insecurity.
- **Institutional barriers**
These can include inflexible curricula, a lack of support and the perceived irrelevance of subject matter.

To counter these, educators must foster:

- **autonomy** by giving learners choice and a voice
- **competence** by building confidence through scaffolded success
- **relatedness** by creating a sense of belonging and connection.

TIRED vs. ALIVE delivery

Delivering English in an ineffective, unengaging way can create more barriers – or exacerbate existing ones.

If you've taken the live online courses that accompany this on-demand course, you'll be familiar with the distinction between TIRED and ALIVE English delivery.

TIRED English delivery is:

Test-focused

Isolated

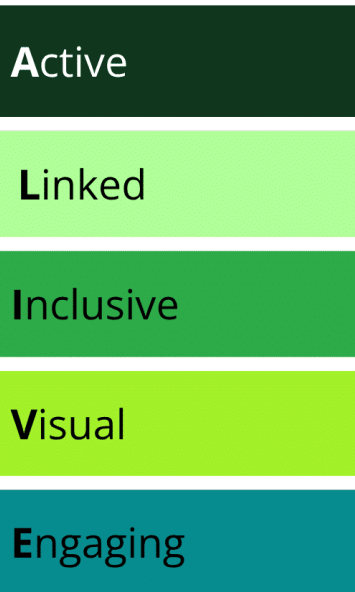
Repetitive

Exam-only

Draining

In brief, TIRED English delivery is characterised by repetitive exam practice, disconnected tasks and low learner autonomy. As a result, it often leads to boredom and resistance.

On the other hand, ALIVE English delivery is:



You'll explore the ALIVE approach in more detail on the next page.

Sorting activity: TIRED and ALIVE

Sort the following teaching characteristics into either **TIRED** or **ALIVE** categories.

Problem-solving and debate	Passive recall activities
Disconnected tasks	Learner choice and voice
Real-world relevance	Emotional and cognitive investment
Low learner autonomy	Repetitive exam practice

Answers

- **TIRED Delivery**
 - Repetitive exam practice
 - Disconnected tasks
 - Low learner autonomy
 - Passive recall activities
- **ALIVE Delivery**
 - Learner choice and voice
 - Real-world relevance
 - Problem-solving and debate
 - Emotional and cognitive investment

Pause and reflect

Think about the learners you're working with.

- Do you know their barriers to learning? If so, what are they?
- Do you think your teaching is more 'TIRED' or 'ALIVE'? Why?

So, how can you ensure that learners are engaged in your English delivery?

To begin with, you'll need to plan your approach. After all, it's unlikely to happen by accident!

For example, you could use the four dimensions of engagement to guide your lesson design.

- **Behavioural**
Are learners actively participating?
- **Emotional**
Do they feel connected and motivated?
- **Cognitive**
Are they thinking deeply and critically?
- **Social**
Are they collaborating and communicating?

Plan lessons with varied components – starters, recall tasks, quizzes, reading, writing – to maintain energy and focus.

Aim for ACTIVE, not TIRED delivery.

- **Active**
Learners solve problems, debate and create.
- **Linked**
Lessons connect to real-world contexts and have vocational relevance.
- **Inclusive**
Activities are accessible and supportive of diverse needs.
- **Visual**
Images, media and hands-on tasks are used.
- **Engaging**
Learners feel emotionally and cognitively invested.

Gamification

Gamifying learning – introducing elements of games to motivate learners – can transform revision and learning into something fun, competitive and rewarding.

It supports:

- **competence** through feedback and mastery
- **relatedness** through collaboration
- **autonomy** through choice and challenge.

You might want to try tools like:

- Blooket
- Formative

- Breaking News English – please note that this is an American site, but resources are also available in British English.

Gamification doesn't need to be complex. Add timers, scores, or badges to existing activities. Use escape rooms, team challenges, or 'beat the teacher' games to energise learners.

Using AI tools to support engagement in English learning

AI tools such as Gemini, CoPilot and ChatGPT allow teachers – and learners – to generate interactive activities and games from scratch. They merely need to enter prompts and feed back on the results until they are happy with the final product. (This process itself may not be assessed within the GCSE curriculum, but it does engage learners with the process of writing for a purpose.)

The following video gives one example of how Gemini can support grammar learning. With clear prompts and further refinements, the tool transforms a piece of text into a 'cloze' or 'gap-fill' activity, then turns that into an interactive quiz, and then develops a *Space Invaders*-style arcade game.

(Please note: The AI tools used and mentioned in this video and throughout this course are just examples. Their inclusion is not intended as an endorsement.)

Video: <https://youtu.be/VnaCWQjMvwg>

Pause and reflect

Is there anything on this page that you'll incorporate into your lesson planning?

Page: Linking vocational learning to English learning

A quick recap

You're approaching the end of your first module. So far, you've explored:

- barriers to engaging with English
- the difference between TIRED and ALIVE English delivery
- how to begin planning for engagement with intention and creativity
- the role of gamification and digital tools in boosting motivation.

Before you move on, you'll consider why it's so important to link vocational learning to English learning. Then you'll reflect on the module as a whole and review some recommended links.

Making connections

A learner's vocational knowledge can be a powerful tool for the English classroom.

An English teacher's role extends beyond literary terms and essay writing – it's also about building a crucial bridge between a learner's hands-on skills and their academic success.

The words learners are learning in subjects like catering, construction or health and social care are not just for those specific lessons – they are a secret weapon. When teachers take the time to acknowledge and build on that vocabulary, it can be a game-changer.

For example, a learner who understands all the parts of a car engine has a distinct advantage when analysing a non-fiction text about engineering. A teacher can guide them from knowing what a 'piston' is to being able to explain its function in a formal paragraph, or to analyse how an author uses that technical language to persuade the reader.

This approach makes learning so much more relevant. When a learner sees that their knowledge from the workshop or the kitchen is valued in the English classroom, it's can be a lightbulb moment that:

- builds their confidence
- helps them to recognise that all of their learning is connected.

By supporting learners to transition from a practical understanding to an intellectual one, a teacher is not just preparing them for their exams – which often use texts from a wide range of fields – but for their future careers. It's about giving learners the language they need to succeed both academically and professionally.

Case study: hospital vocabulary in the English classroom

Watch the following AI-generated video, which depicts a fictional, nine-second conversation between colleagues at a hospital.

What key phrases or words would learners need to know in this video?

Video: <https://youtu.be/CFYwQkFZD-I>

Imagine you're working with some health and social care learners and you've shown them this video.

You could link their vocational learning to their English learning by asking them quiz questions such as the following.

1. What does 'obs' stand for in a hospital setting?
 - a) Objections
 - b) Operations
 - c) Observations
2. What does it mean for a patient to be 'discharged'?
 - a) They are ready to leave the hospital.
 - b) They are being charged for their treatment.
 - c) They are being moved to a different hospital.
3. What are 'notes' in this scenario?

- a) Memos for the next shift.
- b) A patient's personal diary entries.
- c) A patient's formal medical records.

Answers

1	C - Observations (short for vital signs like temperature and blood pressure)
2	A - They are ready to leave the hospital.
3	C - A patient's formal medical records

Why link vocational learning to English learning?

Of course, this is just one example. Whatever your learners are studying, you can find ways to bring the language of the workplace into your classroom.

Doing so effectively can support your learners in the following ways.

Making it relevant

It shows learners the direct, real-world link between their English skills and their chosen career.

Boosting confidence

It validates their existing knowledge, making them feel more capable and less intimidated by new texts.

Providing purpose

English isn't just an abstract subject; it becomes a vital tool for their future jobs.

Connecting the dots

It helps learners see how all their subjects fit together, creating a more coherent learning experience.

Fighting disengagement

Using familiar vocabulary from their vocational course grabs their attention and keeps them focused on the task.

Pause and reflect

- What subjects are your learners studying?
- How could you make connections between their vocational learning and their English learning?

Lesson: Review your learning

Page: Well done

Well done – you've reached the end of Module 1

In this module, you explored:

- barriers to engaging with English
- the difference between TIRED and ALIVE English delivery
- how to begin planning for engagement with intention and creativity
- the role of gamification and digital tools in boosting motivation
- the importance of linking vocational learning to English learning.

On the next page, you'll have the opportunity to review the tools recommended during this module – and some additional reading.

Page: Further resources

Links from this module

- [Blooket | Homepage](#)
- [Formative | Homepage](#)
- [Breaking News English | Homepage](#)
- [ETF Learning Videos | Gamifying with AI tools \(YouTube video\)](#)
- [ETF Learning Videos | Video Transformation to NHS Hospital](#)

Additional reading

- [Tes | 10 Ways to Engage Disruptive GCSE Resit Students](#)
 - [Get Further | Boosting Engagement and Attendance Amongst Resit Students](#)
 - [ResearchGate | Lister, M.: *Gamification: The effect on student motivation and performance at the post-secondary level*](#)
 - [Self-Determination Theory | Applying Self-Determination Theory to Education](#)
-

Module 2: Engaging learners in reading and writing

Lesson: What's happening in this module?

Page: Welcome to Module 2

Welcome to Module 2

Over the next few pages, you'll look at how to engage GCSE resitters with reading and writing through learner-centred strategies that make literacy tasks more relevant, accessible and motivating.

You'll explore:

- pre-reading and during-reading strategies
- preparing for exams and reading exam-style texts
- using reading tasks to inspire and scaffold writing
- engaging with writing
- stimulating ideas and building vocabulary.

Lesson: Engaging learners with reading

Page: Pre-reading and during-reading strategies

In Module 1, you considered how learners who are resitting GCSE English often arrive with a negative outlook. This may well be the case when it comes to reading. GCSE resitters can have limited confidence and fragmented experiences of literacy learning.

As a result, it's crucial that you activate their interest both 'pre reading' – before they have even picked up the text – and 'during reading' – as they are reading it.

Pre-reading and during-reading strategies

Pre-reading strategies

Pre-reading strategies include using:

- **videos and quizzes** to introduce themes
- **vocationally relevant texts** to connect with learners' career goals
- **contextualised topics**, such as environmental issues, to frame reading tasks – by anchoring reading in real-world data and global concerns, educators can foster relevance and critical thinking.

Looking at global literacy statistics in class can contextualise the importance of reading and writing, too. Encourage learners to explore how literacy impacts employment, gender equality and access to education worldwide. The insights they gain may prompt meaningful discussion and reflection – and help learners to appreciate the broader significance of literacy.

During strategies

During-reading strategies include:

- **chunking** texts into manageable parts
- setting **group reading** and collaborative analysis tasks
- encouraging learners to **read aloud** to build fluency and confidence
- using **comprehension questioning** to check understanding

These approaches help learners digest complex material and build a sense of ownership over their reading.

Sorting activity: Pre-reading and during-reading strategies

Sort the following strategies into either **pre-reading** or **during-reading** categories.

Contextualised topics	Videos and quizzes
Reading aloud	Chunking texts
Vocationally relevant texts	Group reading
Comprehension questioning	

Answers

- **Pre-reading**
 - Videos and quizzes
 - Vocationally relevant texts
 - Contextualised topics
- **During-reading**
 - Chunking texts
 - Group reading
 - Reading aloud
 - Comprehension questioning

Pause and reflect

- Do any of your learners have negative outlooks on reading? Why do you think this is?

Page: Preparing for exams

How can you help learners to engage with exam-style texts in a structured and analytical way without resorting to the 'test-focused' and 'exam-only' approaches that are typical of TIRED English delivery?

The 3-2-1 strategy is one possibility.

The 3-2-1 strategy

In this strategy, you invite learners to suggest:

- **3 significant words** that capture the essence of the text
- **2 key phrases** that highlight important ideas
- **1 quotation** that encapsulates the main message.

This method supports learners in distilling meaning and identifying language features, which are essential for exam success.

Pause and reflect

Do you think the 3-2-1 strategy could help your learners to engage with exam-style texts?

Page: Linking reading to writing

How can you use reading tasks to inspire and scaffold writing?

If you plan your lessons thematically, you can integrate reading and writing tasks around a central topic.

This approach helps learners to see the connection between comprehension and expression, making lessons more coherent and engaging.

Consider using:

- **free-writing** tasks to promote creativity and fluency
- **creative prompts** that build on reading themes
- **flexible writing tasks**, ranging from exam-style responses to imaginative storytelling.

By linking reading to writing, educators can reinforce understanding and give learners opportunities to explore ideas in their own voice.

Lesson: Engaging learners with writing

Page: Engaging learners with writing

Writing tasks can be challenging for some learners.

You might encounter learners who are more familiar with the conventions of digital communication – such as texting or posting on social media – than with formal writing. As a result, they may struggle with:

- spelling
- punctuation
- grammar
- handwriting.

As their teacher, you can support them to become more confident, articulate, and prepared for academic and real-world communication.

Consider the following ideas.

- **Practise handwriting**
Give your learners opportunities to practise handwriting so they're prepared for exam conditions.
- **Support with software**
Support learners in using tools like Microsoft Word, especially if they are more familiar with platforms like Google Classroom.
- **Scaffold tasks**
Scaffold writing tasks with planning activities, sentence starters and collaborative discussion.

Using AI tools to support creative writing

AI tools like Craiyon – the free image generator – and the aforementioned Gemini, CoPilot and ChatGPT can support learners with creative writing.

Learners can use these tools to describe a setting or scene and generate it as an image. This visual stimulus can:

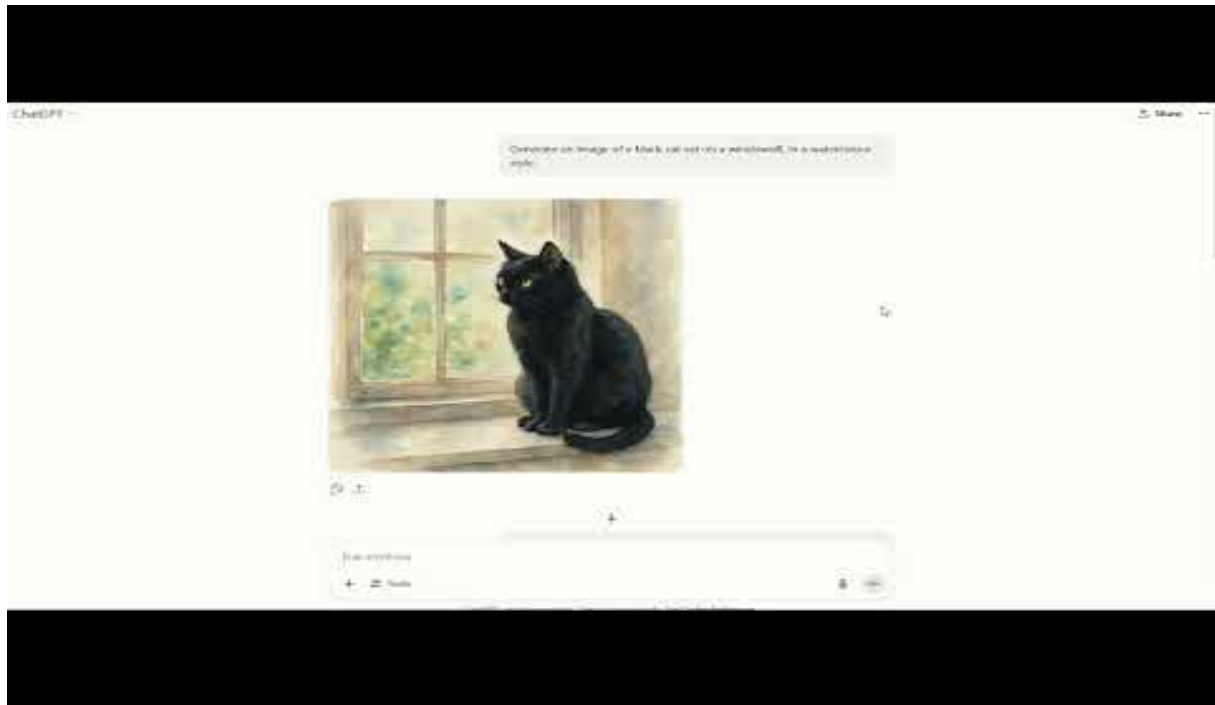
- inspire learners to use descriptive language
- help them to develop narrative structure
- provide them with a sense of ownership and motivation.

By integrating digital creativity with writing instruction, you can tap into learners' interests and make writing tasks more engaging and accessible.

The following video shows how ChatGPT can be used in this way.

(Please note: The AI tools used and mentioned in this video and throughout this course are just examples. Their inclusion is not intended as an endorsement.)

Video: https://youtu.be/D_k5Okuj4WI



Stimulating ideas with multimedia

Learners are more likely to engage with writing when it is inspired by something memorable or emotionally resonant. Consider using:

- **videos**, such as customer service scenarios
- **images**, including AI-generated visuals
- **news stories** and real-world events
- **discussion prompts** and role-play activities.

For example, learners might watch a video of poor customer service and then write an example complaint letter. This not only develops writing skills but also reinforces the relevance of literacy in everyday life and the workplace.

Developing vocabulary

Many learners struggle with:

- **subject-specific terminology**
- **exam command words** (e.g. evaluate, analyse, describe)
- **technical language** used in vocational contexts.

Some of your cohort might have found language and vocabulary challenging since childhood because they:

- have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- speak English as an additional language
- have not been exposed to rich written and oral language.
- experience peer pressure (where using ‘big words’ is interpreted as pretentious).

This can hold them back because:

“Language... unlocks... the capacity to explore new subjects and releases our potential to learn and grow as an individual... it underpins progress, impacts on attainment... affects self-esteem and behaviour and plays a huge role in a child’s future life chances. Without enough language – a word gap – a child is seriously limited in their enjoyment of school and success beyond.”

(OUP & CFEY, 2020)

It’s important to:

- teach vocabulary explicitly
- use word banks and glossaries
- reinforce new words through repetition and application.

There are many benefits to expanding learners’ vocabularies.

- **Quicker thinking**
Learners will process technical information more quickly.
- **Improved writing**
Learners will see improvements in their written communication.
- **More confidence**
Learners will be more confident in exams and workplace settings.
- **Better understanding**
Learners will have a better understanding of complex texts and conversations.

Matching activity: Writing challenges and support strategies

Match each learner challenge with the most appropriate support strategy.

Learner Challenge	Support Strategy
A. Struggles with formal writing conventions	1. Provide opportunities to practise handwriting

B. Limited vocabulary	2. Use multimedia and AI-generated images to inspire ideas
C. Poor handwriting	3. Use word banks, glossaries, and explicit vocabulary teaching
D. Low motivation for creative writing	4. Scaffold tasks with planning and sentence starters

Answers

- A → 4
- B → 3
- C → 1
- D → 2

Pause and reflect

- Do any of your learners struggle with writing? Why do you think that is?
- How can you support them to become confident writers?
- How can you develop their vocabularies?

References

Oxford University Press and Centre for Education and Youth (2020), *Why closing the word gap matters: Oxford language report* [online]. Available from: <http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/oxed/Oxford-Language-Report.PDF?region=uk> [Accessed 24 August 2026].

Lesson: Review your learning

Page: Congratulations

Congratulations – you’ve nearly reached the end of ‘Improving Attendance, Motivation and Engagement in GCSE English Resit Lessons’

Over the past two modules, you’ve covered the following learning objectives:

- Identify key barriers to engagement in GCSE English and how they manifest in learners
- Consider how to design dynamic English lessons that go beyond exam-focused repetition.

What next?

Remember: this course is part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.

Page: Further resources

Links from this module

- [Craiyn | Homepage](#)
- [Oxford University Press and Centre for Education and Youth | Why Closing the Word Gap Matters: Oxford Language Report](#)
- [ETF Learning Videos | AI image generation \(YouTube video\)](#)

Page: Action planning

Now that you have completed the course, what will you do next?

Use this page to set yourself short- and long-term targets relating to any part of this course.

Professional development is an ongoing process. Making time to reflect on and refine how you work can be really challenging – but it is time well spent. Creating a simple plan will help you to embed what you have learnt and set a timescale for your next steps.

Target	What will I do to achieve my target?	Who might help me?	When will I achieve it?

Remember: this is a process for you. It might be helpful to share some of your thinking with colleagues, a mentor or a line manager at an appraisal – but, first and foremost, an action plan should reflect what you feel is important.