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AEIS English

Lesson 2 — Opening with Speech

The dialogue hook · punctuating speech · the SPARK setup

Secondary 2 · Student

A complete lesson on starting your composition with a line of speech — why the dialogue hook works, how to punctuate it, and how to anchor it — with worked models and AEIS-style practice for the Secondary 2 paper.

90-minute lesson · Notes + Worksheet + Homework

Aligned to MOE AEIS (Secondary) · Part 1 Composition

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START HERE

How to use this booklet

Notes, worksheet and homework for one 90-minute lesson

What is inside

- **Section A — Diagnostic.** A short punctuation test you do first, before any teaching, so you can see what you already control.
- **Section B — Notes.** Why a speech opening hooks the reader, the five rules for punctuating dialogue, the four kinds of opening, and how to anchor the line.
- **Section C — Worksheet.** Six exercises that build from punctuating single lines to writing your own opening.
- **Section D — Model openings.** Three complete openings, each begun with speech, pulled apart so you can see why they work.
- **Section E — Homework.** AEIS-style punctuation practice, rewriting, and two openings of your own to write.

How the AEIS paper tests this

In the AEIS Secondary paper you write a **narrative composition** (Part 1) of about **300–400 words**. The examiner meets your writing in its first two lines — a strong **opening** earns their attention at once, and a line of **speech** is one of the most reliable hooks. If the prompt gives you a first sentence to use, keep it word-for-word, then add your speech hook straight after.

Study tip

Do Section A before you read the notes. Mark it after the lesson to see how much your punctuation has improved.

SECTION A · WARM DIAGNOSTIC**Diagnostic test**11 items · do this BEFORE the notes

Part 1 — Punctuate the speech*Copy each line out with correct speech marks, commas, capital letters and end marks. (6 marks)*1. wait for me shouted Ben

2. i can't find my ticket she whispered

3. the teacher said sit down now

4. why are you crying asked Mother

5. run he screamed the water is rising

6. i'll never forgive you muttered Rahim

Part 2 — One error each — fix it*Each line has ONE punctuation or capital-letter slip. Write out the corrected line. (5 marks)*7. "Where are we going? asked Tom.

8. "stop!" yelled the guard.

9. "It's too late." she sighed.

10. Mother said "come inside."

11. "I'm scared," She said.

SECTION B · NOTES

Opening with speech

Why it works · punctuation · the four hooks · anchoring the line

1. Why open with speech?

A composition's first two lines decide whether the examiner reads on with real interest or simply keeps marking. A line of speech is one of the surest ways to earn that interest: someone is already talking, so something is already happening. Before you have described a single thing, the reader is asking three questions — *Who said that? Why? What happens next?* That pull is the **hook**.

Speech also reveals **emotion** and **character** instantly: a shout, a whisper and a cold command each set a different mood in a handful of words. In the **SPARK** framework your opening is the **SETUP (S)**, and a dialogue hook is one of the best ways to begin it — a single line can deliver a person, a feeling and a hint of the coming **PROBLEM** all at once.

A flat opening...	...becomes a speech opening
It was a hot day and I was walking to school.	"You're going to be late again!" Mother called from the kitchen.
My sister was very upset that morning.	"I never want to see you again!" my sister screamed, slamming her door.
We were all excited about the trip.	"The bus is here!" Ravi yelled, waving both arms.

2. Punctuating direct speech — five rules

This is the skill that makes or breaks a speech opening. Drill these five rules until they are automatic.

- **Rule 1 — Wrap only the spoken words.** Put speech marks “ ” around exactly what is said, and nothing else.
- **Rule 2 — Capital letter to start.** The first spoken word always begins with a capital: “**C**ome here.”
- **Rule 3 — End marks go inside.** The comma, full stop, question mark or exclamation mark that belongs to the speech sits **inside** the closing speech mark.
- **Rule 4 — Join speech and tag with a comma.** Speech first: “I’m ready,” she said. Tag first: She said, “I’m ready.” If the speech ends in ? or !, keep it and add no comma: “Are you ready?” she asked.
- **Rule 5 — New speaker, new line.** Every time the person speaking changes, start a new paragraph.

Build a line, step by step: wait she said → “Wait” → “Wait,” → “Wait,” she said.

Vary the reporting verb

Instead of ‘said’, match the volume or feeling	Examples
Loud	shouted, yelled, cried, screamed, bellowed
Soft	whispered, murmured, muttered, breathed
Neutral	said, replied, answered, added
With feeling	begged, snapped, gasped, pleaded, sneered

Do not chase fancy verbs at the cost of clarity. **Said** is almost invisible and always correct — reach for a stronger verb only when it adds real emotion.

3. Four kinds of opening — pick to match the feeling

Choose a hook whose feeling matches the emotion you planned for your SETUP.

Hook	What it does	Example
The cry	fear or urgency	“Run! The water’s rising!”
The whisper	secrecy or tension	“Don’t move,” she breathed. “It’s still there.”
The command	authority or conflict	“Sit down. Now.”
The question	curiosity or mystery	“Have you seen this before?” the old man asked.

4. Anchor the line — never let speech float

A line of speech with nobody attached and nowhere to stand confuses the reader. As you write the opening, give three anchors quickly: **who** is speaking (a name or tag), **where or when** we are (a touch of setting), and **what** the speaker is doing (an action beat).

The formula: SPEECH + speaker tag + action / setting beat.

“Wait for me!” I shouted, sprinting after the departing bus, my bag thumping against my back.

Do	Don’t
Make the first spoken line carry tension, emotion or character.	Open with an empty greeting — “Hi.” “How are you?” — that wastes the hook.
Follow the speech with an action beat and a little setting.	Let the dialogue float with no speaker and no scene.
Let one strong line do the work.	Pile up exclamation marks or five shouting verbs in a row.

On the AEIS paper: if the prompt gives you a **first sentence**, you must copy it word-for-word as line 1 — but you can still put your line of speech immediately after it. If the prompt only says a sentence must **appear somewhere**, open with speech and weave that sentence in later.

SECTION C · GUIDED PRACTICE

Worksheet

Six exercises, single line to whole opening

Exercise 1 — Punctuate the speech

Rewrite each line with correct speech marks, commas, capital letters and end marks.

1. stop that noise shouted the librarian

2. i think we are lost whispered Maya

3. the coach said give me ten more laps

4. are you sure about this asked Deepa

5. don't touch it he warned it's still hot

6. we won Mother we actually won i cried

7. where have you been demanded Father

8. i'll go first said Ken bravely

Exercise 2 — Stop the speech from floating

Each line of speech has nobody attached and nowhere to stand. Add a speaker tag AND a short action beat so the reader knows who is speaking, and what they are doing.

1. "Fire!" _____

2. "I'm not going in there." _____

3. "You promised!" _____

4. “Is anyone there?” _____

5. “We did it!” _____

6. “Don’t move.” _____

Exercise 3 — Match the line to the feeling

For each feeling, circle the opening line that matches it better.

1. Feeling: FEAR

- (A) “What a lovely morning!” she yawned.
- (B) “Something moved in the dark,” he whispered.

2. Feeling: JOY

- (A) “We’re the champions!” we screamed, leaping into the air.
- (B) “I suppose we lost again,” he sighed.

3. Feeling: ANGER

- (A) “How dare you touch my things!” I snapped.
- (B) “Take your time, there’s no rush,” she smiled.

4. Feeling: GUILT

- (A) “It was me. I broke it,” I admitted, staring at the floor.
- (B) “This is the best day ever!” I laughed.

5. Feeling: URGENCY

- (A) “Let’s sit and rest a while,” Grandpa said.
- (B) “Get out — the building’s on fire!” the guard bellowed.

Exercise 4 — Turn a flat opening into a speech opening

Rewrite each dull opening so it BEGINS with a line of speech. Add a speaker tag and an action beat. (Many good answers are possible — a model is given in the key.)

1. It was the morning of the exam and I felt very nervous.

2. My little brother had broken my model aeroplane.

3. We were lost in the forest as it grew dark.

4. My best friend was moving away and I was sad.

5. The championship match was about to begin.

Exercise 5 — Editing: one slip per line

Each numbered line has ONE punctuation or capital-letter error. Underline it and write the correction in the box.

# Line (one slip each)	Correction
1. “run!” he shouted, leaping to his feet.	
2. “It is locked.” she said, rattling the gate.	
3. Father said “Come here at once.”	
4. “why are we stopping?” I asked.	
5. “We made it,” I gasped “We’re finally safe!”	
6. “Don’t come any closer” she warned.	
7. The little boy cried, “help me!”	
8. “I’ll be back before dark”, she promised.	

Exercise 6 — Build your own opening

Choose ONE prompt. Write a three-line opening: a line of SPEECH, a speaker tag with an action beat, then ONE sentence that grounds the scene (who, where, what you want).

- (a) Write about a time you had to be brave.
- (b) Write about an unexpected visitor.
- (c) Write about a difficult decision you once made.

SECTION D · MODELS

Model openings

Three openings, each begun with speech, pulled apart

Read each opening, then check the notes beside it. Notice how every one follows the same recipe: a strong spoken line, an anchor, and a hint of the trouble to come.

Model 1 · Prompt: “A time you had to be brave” · Fear → Determination

“Don’t look down. Whatever you do, don’t look down.” I repeated the words under my breath, my fingers welded to the rusty rungs of the water tower. Forty feet below, my friends had shrunk to a cluster of pale, upturned faces. I had promised them I would ring the old bell at the very top — and a promise, I had come to learn, was a debt you paid with your courage.

Why it works

- Opens on an **inner command** — it creates tension without needing a second character to speak.
- **Anchors** the scene fast: the ladder, the water tower, forty feet, the friends below.
- Plants the **SETUP goal** (ring the bell) and hints at the **PROBLEM** to come (the height, the fear).

Model 2 · Prompt: “An unexpected visitor” · Surprise → Unease

“Is your mother home?” The man on our doorstep was smiling, but the smile never reached his eyes. Rain dripped from the brim of his hat onto a battered leather case that he hugged against his chest. I had never seen him before in my life, and yet he had spoken my name as though we were old friends.

Why it works

- Opens on a **question** — the reader instantly wants to know who he is and what he wants.
- The speaker **tag** does double duty, revealing character through the cold, joyless smile.
- Setting and mystery arrive together: the rain, the case, and “he had spoken my name”.

Model 3 · Prompt: “A difficult decision” · Anxiety → Guilt

“You didn’t see anything. Understand?” Jia Hui’s grip tightened on my wrist as the teacher’s footsteps grew louder down the corridor. I understood perfectly. I also knew that a single word from me could clear an innocent boy’s name — and end the only true friendship I had ever had.

Why it works

- Opens **in the middle of a conflict** — a command that immediately raises the stakes.
- A quick **action beat** (the grip, the approaching footsteps) grounds the moment in a real place.
- The final line frames the exact **difficult decision** the rest of the story will resolve.

SECTION E · HOMEWORK

Homework

AEIS-style punctuation, rewriting and writing

Homework 1 — Punctuation (AEIS multiple-choice)

Which sentence is punctuated correctly? Circle A, B, C or D.

1.
 - (A) “come in” said the nurse.
 - (B) “Come in,” said the nurse.
 - (C) “Come in”, said the nurse.
 - (D) “come in,” said the nurse.
2.
 - (A) “Are you hurt?” asked the coach.
 - (B) “Are you hurt”? asked the coach.
 - (C) “Are you hurt?,” asked the coach.
 - (D) “are you hurt?” asked the coach.
3.
 - (A) He shouted, “stop the bus!”
 - (B) He shouted “Stop the bus!”
 - (C) He shouted, “Stop the bus!”
 - (D) He shouted, “Stop the bus”!
4.
 - (A) “I’m tired,” she said.
 - (B) “I’m tired.” she said.
 - (C) “I’m tired” she said.
 - (D) “I’m tired,” She said.
5.
 - (A) “Watch out!” screamed Mei.
 - (B) “Watch out”? screamed Mei.
 - (C) “watch out!” screamed Mei.
 - (D) “Watch out!,” screamed Mei.
6.
 - (A) “We won the match,” he grinned.
 - (B) “We won the match” he grinned.
 - (C) “We won the match,” He grinned.
 - (D) “we won the match,” he grinned.
7.
 - (A) The girl whispered “follow me.”
 - (B) The girl whispered, “Follow me.”
 - (C) The girl whispered, “follow me.”
 - (D) The girl whispered “Follow me”.
8.
 - (A) “Where is everyone?,” I wondered.
 - (B) “Where is everyone”? I wondered.
 - (C) “Where is everyone?” I wondered.
 - (D) “where is everyone?” I wondered.

Homework 2 — Turn flat openings into speech openings

Rewrite each opening so it begins with a line of speech, with a tag and an action beat.

1. It was raining heavily and our school trip was cancelled.

2. My grandmother had forgotten who I was.

3. I was terrified before my first speech on stage.

Homework 3 — Write two opening paragraphs

For EACH prompt below, write the opening paragraph of the story (about 40–60 words). Begin with a line of speech, follow the SPEECH + tag + action-beat formula, then add one or two sentences that ground the scene and point towards a problem.

1. Write about a time when you kept a promise.

2. Write a story in which a sudden storm changes someone's plans.
