

The Perfect Storm: First (FCE) Preparation Material

Task 1 Before reading

- 1 What do you think the cover of the book and the title tell people about the story? Do they make you want to read the book? Why/Why not?
- 2 Do you think people are more or less interested in reading the story when they know that it is a true story? Why?

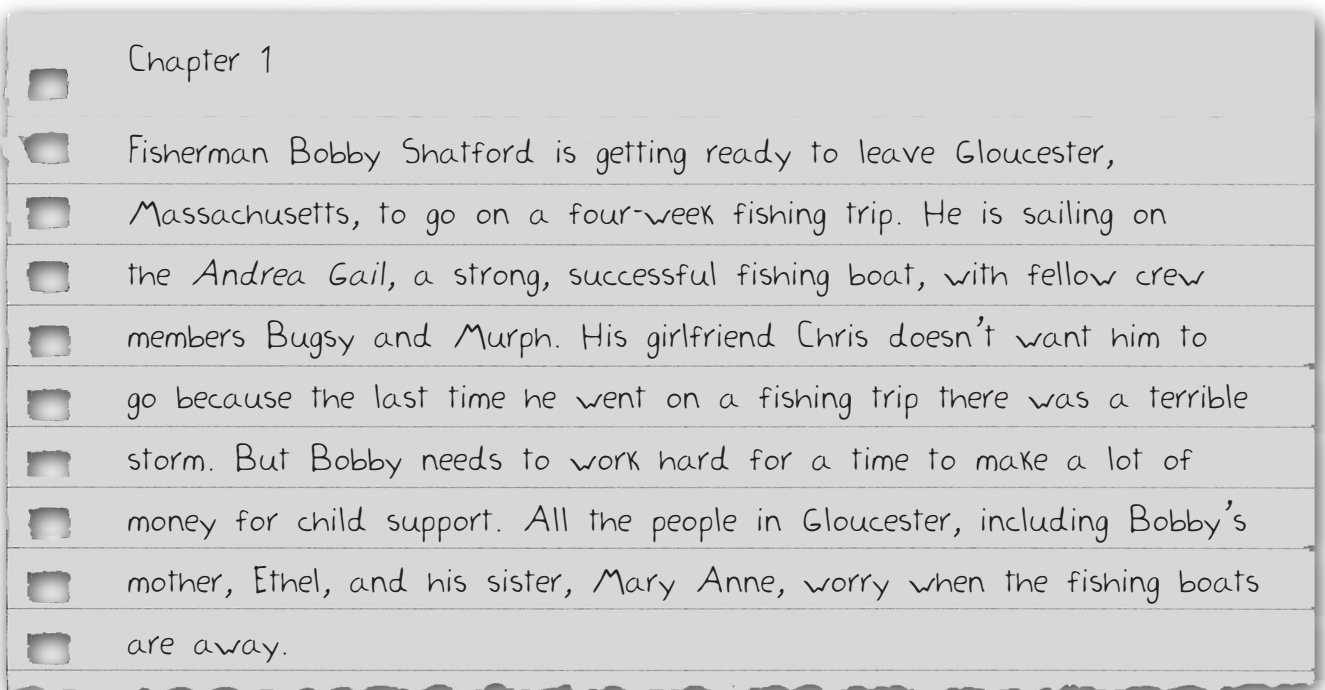
Task 2 Knowing the background

- 1 Read the notes about the author and the book and write a short paragraph about the background to the story. Think about these questions:
 - 1 What do you learn about Sebastian Junger's life?
 - 2 Why did he become a journalist?
 - 3 Why did he decide to write this story?
 - 4 How did he get the information he needed to write the story?
 - 5 What is The Perfect Storm Foundation?

Task 3 Summarizing the plot

- 1 When you finish reading each chapter, write three or four sentences to summarize the action in that chapter. Later you can reread the summaries to remind yourself of the sequence of events.

Example



☀ Tips

- A When writing a summary, try not to look back at the chapter. You will usually find that the events that you can remember are the most important ones and these are what you should include in your summary.
- B Use words and phrases to link your sentences and indicate the sequence of events, e.g. *first, after this, when, while, then, because* etc.
- C When telling a story of a book or a film, we usually use the present simple tense, e.g. *he visits, they go, she sees*.

- 2 Put the titles of the chapters in the correct order.

Rescuers in the Storm	Dreams of the Dead	Saying Goodbye
The Grand Banks	A Long Night for the <i>Tamaroa</i>	First Warnings
The Search for the <i>Andrea Gail</i>	Into the Storm	Preparing to Leave
What Happened to the <i>Andrea Gail</i> ?		

- 3 Test your partner (or yourself). Choose the title of one chapter at random and, without looking at your notes, say what that chapter is about.
- 4 Choose a sentence from your chapter summaries. Tell your partner. Can he/she guess which chapter it is from?
- 5 Choose one event from each chapter and jumble the order. Can your partner rearrange them into the correct order?

Task 4 Recording factual information

- 1 Nearly every chapter of *The Perfect Storm* gives some interesting factual information. Note down some of the information as you read the book. Summarize information about the following:
- 1 The work of a swordfishing boat.
 - 2 The life of a fisherman.
 - 3 Preparations for a fishing trip.
 - 4 The *Andrea Gail*.
 - 5 Preparations for a storm.
 - 6 Communications with a ship at sea.
 - 7 Ways of rescuing people at sea.

Task 5 Noting vocabulary

- 1 Note down important vocabulary from each chapter.
- 2 There is a lot of new vocabulary related to fish, fishing and boats. Some of this is quite technical. Read through the new vocabulary illustrated by pictures at the beginning of the book. Do not try to remember it all. Look back at this when you read the words in context, as you will remember better then. That is the best time to record the new words.

Tips

A It is important to use a range of vocabulary in your writing. Divide the new vocabulary into categories:

- 1 Technical vocabulary connected to fishing and boats, e.g. *galley, bunks, pilot house, hull* etc.
- 2 Adjectives used to describe the atmosphere, the weather, the people, feelings and places, e.g. *experienced, skilful, enormous, unusual, rough, misty* etc.
- 3 Verbs to talk about different actions, e.g. *shouted, screamed, whispered, glared, crashed, blow hard, head out* etc.
- 4 Adverbs to describe actions, e.g. *rapidly, excitedly, worriedly, calmly* etc.

B Try to record new vocabulary in context, e.g. *Bobby had to pay his wife more money for **child support**.*

Task 6 Describing events

- 1 Choose an event in the book to describe. Talk about its place in the story, what happens, the atmosphere (if relevant) and how the character(s) are feeling. Say why the event is important.

Example

One of the most dramatic events in the story is the rescue of four National Guardsmen. They were part of the five-man crew of a rescue helicopter. Their helicopter runs out of fuel and crashes into the sea. Four of the men in the water group together for safety. Another helicopter sent to rescue them has to leave because it doesn't have enough fuel and the conditions are so bad that it cannot help them. It is a terrible moment for the men to see its lights disappear and they feel very much alone in the dark sea with the huge waves lifting them up and down. They are all tired and cold and afraid that they will die in the water. Then they see the lights of a ship in the distance. It is the coastguard's ship, the *Tamaroa*, which had already saved the lives of other people that night. The *Tamaroa* gets as close as it can to the men in the water but it is impossible to throw any safety lines to them because the sea is so rough. The captain decides that their best chance is to put a net over the side of the boat. Then the men can swim to it and climb up. It is very difficult because the men are weak but they manage to get to safety. Sadly the fifth crew member is never found. This is a powerful part of the story as we can feel the strength of the sea and how little the men are in comparison. It shows us how courageous the people are whose job it is to rescue people in terrible conditions, and how often they put their own lives in danger.

Tip

Use a range of vocabulary to describe the event.

2 Read these quotations from the book. Which people and/or events do they refer to?

- 1 'She held onto him for twenty minutes and wouldn't let him go.'
- 2 'When he saw a boat he knew at once if it was safe or not.'
- 3 'She took her passport and stuck it onto her body with sticky tape.'
- 4 'Not everybody was as lucky as he was that night.'
- 5 'The exhausted man nodded.'
- 6 'They were drinking beer and waiting for news.'
- 7 'It wasn't his fault but nobody could forget it.'
- 8 'He took a job on a tuna fishing boat called the *Terri Lei*.'

3 Write a description of what you think happened to the *Andrea Gail*.

Task 7 Identifying what makes the story exciting and interesting

1 Read these comments from people about why they find the story exciting and interesting. Find examples from the story to support these comments. Do you agree with them? Why/Why not?

1 *In my opinion the story is exciting because you know what's going to happen and there's an inevitability about the ending but you still keep reading!*

2 *The story was interesting for me because it mixes factual information and exciting action.*

3 *I found the story interesting because you learn a lot about the lives fishermen lead today and how dangerous their jobs are.*

4 *What I enjoyed was the battle for survival against the power of nature.*

5 *I like the way the writer often tells us things that happen without overdramatizing them. It's like a diary of events and we imagine ourselves how the characters are feeling and what the atmosphere is like.*

6 *I think the story is popular because most people can understand the fear that there must be when you see nature at its most powerful and we realize how little we really are!*

2 Write your own comment.

Task 8 Discussing themes

- 1 With a partner or in small groups discuss and then write answers to these questions about different themes that come up in the book.
 - 1 What do we learn about swordfishing in *The Perfect Storm*?
 - 2 What is the life of a fisherman in Gloucester like?
 - 3 Could the loss of the *Andrea Gail* have been prevented? How?
 - 4 What do you learn about the relationship between men and the sea in *The Perfect Storm*?
 - 5 Fishermen are very superstitious. How do superstition and premonition feature in the story?
 - 6 What is a 'perfect storm'?
 - 7 Do you know of any other stories where people have fought against the natural elements and lost?
 - 8 Do you think we will ever be able to control the weather?
 - 9 What other dangerous jobs do you know about? Do you think people will always continue to do them? Why?
 - 10 How is *The Perfect Storm* different from a typical disaster story?

Task 9 Giving opinions and recommending

- 1 When you finish the book, write some sentences about your opinions of the following:
 - 1 the story
 - 2 the beginning/ending
 - 3 the writer's style

Useful language

Giving opinions

In my opinion ...

I really enjoyed ...

For me, the story was too ...

On one hand I thought the story was good because ...

But on the other hand I got bored in a few places, for example when...

I think the writer should have started .../finished ...

I would have preferred a different beginning/ending because ...

I like the writer's style because it's not too confusing and he can describe things very clearly, for example ...

I think the writer creates very realistic scenes such as ...

- 2 Do you agree or disagree with these statements? Why?
 - 1 The writer creates a fast-moving story and you never get bored.
 - 2 I sometimes found the explanations about fishing complicated and confusing.
 - 3 The best thing about the book is that it really makes you think about the important things in life as well as being an exciting story.
 - 4 I thought the whole thing was very realistic.

3 Would you recommend the book to other people?

Yes, because ...

No, because ...

Useful language

Recommending

You should definitely read/not read this book ...

You would love this book ...

I can't recommend this book enough.

I think you might be disappointed by this book.

This book isn't really suitable for people who ...

First (FCE) Writing Exam Tasks

Completing tasks 1 to 9 above will help you prepare for First (FCE) writing exam tasks. Here are some examples of different types of questions you might have to do on *The Perfect Storm* in the writing exam.

Remember

- Answer the question you are asked – do not memorize an answer you have written before.
- Think about the person who is going to read your answer and decide if your language should be formal, semi-formal or informal.
- Organize your answer clearly into paragraphs and join sentences with linking devices.
- Use a range of vocabulary.
- Check your work for mistakes when you are finished.
- Try to keep to the word limit (120–180 words).

1 Letters

You may be asked to write a reply to a friend's letter or email asking you some questions about the book.

Example question

This is part of a letter from your English-speaking penfriend.

I've just finished reading The Perfect Storm and I can't decide whether they were right to go fishing at that time of year or not. What do you think? Write and tell me.

Laura

Write a **letter** to your penfriend, giving your opinion.

Here are some more examples of questions a penfriend might ask you.

- 1 I don't understand why they say that it was a 'perfect storm'. It seems to me that it should be a 'terrible storm'! Can you explain?
- 2 There are a lot of adventure and disaster films and stories these days. Why do you think *The Perfect Storm* is so popular?
- 3 At the end of *The Perfect Storm* we never know exactly what happened to the *Andrea Gail*. Don't you think that's a bit disappointing for the reader? Write and tell me.
- 4 Help! I'm a bit confused about why Billy Tyne didn't avoid the storm and go home! Can you explain? Thanks!

Tips

- A In a letter or email to a friend you can use colloquial expressions.
- B Make sure you start and end the letter or email appropriately, e.g. *Dear ...*, *Hi ...*, *Love from ...*, *All the best*.

2 Essays

You may be asked to write an essay for your teacher about something you have discussed in class.

Example question

Your English teacher has given you this question for homework.

Which part of The Perfect Storm do you think is most exciting, and why?

Write your **essay**.

Here are some more examples of essay questions.

- 1 What future do you imagine for Christina after the disappearance of the *Andrea Gail*?
- 2 Do you think the loss of the *Andrea Gail* was anyone's fault? Why/Why not?
- 3 Who do you think was the real hero of the story? Why?
- 4 Explain the importance of superstition and premonition in the story *The Perfect Storm*.
- 5 Describe what you think probably happened to the *Andrea Gail*.
- 6 What lessons do you think people can learn from reading *The Perfect Storm*?

Tip

In an essay you should write an introduction, a main paragraph or two and a conclusion.

3 Articles

You may be asked to write an article for a magazine/competition etc.

Example question

We are looking for articles about books where people have to make important decisions. The best articles will be published next month.

Write an **article** about the decisions Billy Tyne had to make in *The Perfect Storm*.

Here are some more examples of articles.

- 1 We are looking for articles about an exciting, fast-moving adventure story you have read recently. Write an article about *The Perfect Storm*.
- 3 We are looking for articles about books that have the theme of 'the power of nature'. Write an article about this theme in *The Perfect Storm*.
- 4 We are looking for articles about books in which people have to do dangerous jobs to earn a living. Write an article about this theme in *The Perfect Storm*.
- 5 We are looking for articles about books in which a prediction came true. Write an article about how a prediction came true in *The Perfect Storm*.



Tip

Organize your article into different parts and use a semi-formal/formal style.

4 Reviews

You may be asked to write a review of the book or the film (if you have seen it) for a magazine/website etc.

Example question

Have you read a book recently that you really enjoyed? Write a review of the book for the college magazine and say why you enjoyed it and why you would recommend it to other readers.

Write a **review** of *The Perfect Storm* for the magazine.

Here are some more example questions.

- 1 Write a review for a Real-Life Mysteries website saying what the most interesting parts of the book are for people who like real-life adventure mysteries.
- 2 Write a review of the film of *The Perfect Storm* and say what differences you noticed.



Tip

Give a general view of the book including a short summary of the plot, what is interesting about it and a recommendation.

5 Reports

You may be asked to write a report for a club or teacher.

Example question

You belong to a book club. Write a **report** for the book club about *The Perfect Storm*. Point out the good and bad points of the book and whether you would recommend it for other book clubs to read and discuss.

Here is another example of a report.

- 1 Your teacher is planning to buy a set of books for one of his/her classes to read and discuss. Write a **report** about *The Perfect Storm* saying why you think he/she should or should not buy a group set of the books.

Tip

Divide your answer into different paragraphs with headings: story/characters/themes/recommendation.