

# The Wave

Writing about non-fiction texts in well-structured paragraphs.

There's nothing quite like a good disaster story. We love them, in film, in novels and in non-fiction. What is it that fascinates us so much? The danger? The fear? The clever solutions people find to escape extreme situations? The tragedy of untimely death? Whatever it is, disaster stories are an ever-popular genre, and that means you could find a passage from one appearing on your exam paper. Here we look at how writers create those terrifying moments where you don't know whether or not the people will get out alive.

## The Wave by Susan Casey

The clock read midnight when the hundred-foot wave hit the ship, rising from the North Atlantic out of the darkness. Among the ocean's terrors a wave this size was the most feared and the least understood, more myth than reality – or so people had thought. This giant was certainly real. As the RRS *Discovery* plunged down into the wave's deep trough, it heeled twenty-eight degrees to port, rolled thirty degrees back to starboard, then recovered to face the incoming seas. What chance did they have, the forty-seven scientists and crew aboard this research cruise gone horribly wrong? A series of storms had trapped them in the black void east of Rockall, a volcanic island nicknamed Waveland for the nastiness of its surrounding waters. More than a thousand wrecked ships lay on the seafloor below.

Captain Keith Avery steered his vessel directly into the onslaught, just as he'd been doing for the past five days. While weather like this was common in the cranky North Atlantic, these giant waves were unlike anything he'd encountered in his thirty years of experience. And worse, they kept rearing up from different directions. Flanking all sides of the 295-foot ship, the crew kept a constant watch to make sure they weren't about to be sucker punched by a wave that was sneaking up from behind, or from the sides. No one wanted to be out here right now, but Avery knew their only hope was to remain where they were, with their bow pointed into the waves. Turning around was too risky; if one of these waves caught *Discovery* broadside, there would be long odds on survival. It takes thirty tons per square meter of force to dent a ship. A breaking hundred-foot wave packs one hundred tons of force per square meter and can tear a ship in half. Above all, Avery had to position *Discovery* so that it rode over these crests and wasn't crushed beneath them.

*The Wave: In Pursuit of the Oceans' Greatest Furies*, by Susan Casey, is published by Yellow Jersey, priced £17.99.

## REVISION IN MINUTES



**7**  
minutes

This essay has a poor opening sentence. All it does is repeat the question, and that is a total waste of time! Re-write it to make a much sparkier impression.

**17**  
minutes

Re-write the extract from *The Wave* so it no longer sounds terrifying. What other techniques can you find that the writer used?

## How does the writer use language to make the experience sound terrifying?

This passage uses language to make the situation sound terrifying. The ocean is described as a dark, sneaky, powerful opponent. It is an ocean of "darkness" and a "black void". The crew are wary of being "sucker punched" and of the ocean "sneaking up from behind". In the second paragraph, the writer uses the imagery of fighting and battles, with the crew "flanking all sides" against the waves. All of these images create an impression of a terrifying encounter with an unpredictable enemy.

The writer uses words that make us think of adventure stories, where danger looms at every moment. She does this by using genre clichés like "gone horribly wrong" and "their only hope". She also makes it sound like an adventure story by using the immediate past tense to describe the action, and verbs that describe violent actions, like "plunged", "heeled" and "rolled". This makes the reader feel more terrified because the action seems to be all around you as you read.

The writer really seems to be trying to convince you of how bad the situation was. She uses powerful devices to persuade you, such as the parallelism in "most feared and the least understood". The contrast between "most" and "least" grabs the reader's attention, but in fact the words make similar points. The writer also uses a rhetorical question: "what chance did they have...?" This again suggests to the reader an atmosphere like an adventure story. It makes us want to know what happens.

Finally, Susan Casey makes the situation sound terrifying by using the power of suggestion and leaving the implications to your imagination. She gives the reader a memorable fact about the large number of ships destroyed in this area of the ocean: "More than a thousand wrecked ships lay on the seafloor below." The suggestion is that this terrible fate may also be in store for the crew of the current ship. It is a matter of life and death.

In conclusion, the writer has a high control over the language used in this piece, making the reader feel close to the terrifying ordeal of the crew. I thought the simple fact which showed the deadly impact of waves on ships was the most powerful effect in making it seem scary.

### KEY

- █ Introduction/conclusion
- █ Point
- █ Evidence/examples
- █ Explanation