



INTERCAMBIODIOMASONLINE

WRITING GUIDE FOR  
THE B2 (FCE/ISE II)



**HOW TO ACE THE WRITING TASKS**

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### **The guide to the writing tasks for the First Certificate**

The writing part of the FCE consists of two texts; the first is an obligatory essay and the second is a choice of 3 texts. This document will explain all the types of text and how to pass them with AN A GRADE.

### **Explanation of all of the writing tasks**

- Typical questions
- Evaluation scale

### **Examples of the types of texts that you need to practice with structural help**

- essays
- A formal letter/email
- An informal letter/email
- An article
- A review
- A report

### **Key phrases for better writing**

### **Key phrases to explain your opinion**

### **Key phrases to justify your opinion**

### **Connectors and linking phrases**

### **Example questions for you to practice at home**

- Two of these will be corrected by a Cambridge Examiner



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**What tasks does the writing part of the exam consist of?**

There are 4 questions.

The 1<sup>st</sup> task is obligatory. You must do question 1 and it is always an essay. The topics are varied but they are usually social issues, about the environment or the advantages/disadvantages of something.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> task is a choice; you can answer one question of 2, 3, 4. DO NOT ANSWER ALL OF THE QUESTIONS. The choices include: a letter (formal or informal), an email, a review, an article or a report. My suggestion is to focus on writing a formal or informal letter, a review and an article. The letter and the email are almost identical, so you cover both of them. **The report is a little difficult** because of the organisation and format.



## Typical questions

### 1. Should you do a plan?

Yes! You must make a plan to organise your writing. On the day of the exam, you will be stressed and feel pressure. A plan is your way of organising your text and your thoughts.

### 2. What happens if I write more than 190 words?

Nothing... Well, almost nothing. In the past for every 5 words extra, they took away a point, however, now they do not. It is not good to go over 190 words because of time, but you can. I wouldn't write more than 200 words because they will probably lower the mark they give you for content. They will determine some of it to be unnecessary.

### 3. What counts as complex language in the exam?

You **MUST** use complex language at B2 level. You must use attention grabbing vocabulary and a variety of grammar structures. The passive voice, relative clauses, modal verbs, conditionals, reported speech and inversions all count as **COMPLEX** grammar forms and you must use them.



## Evaluation Scale explained

The writing part of the exam lasts for 1 hour 20 minutes (80 minutes). In this time the candidates need to write two texts of 160-190 words. To say what grade you need to pass the writing part of the exam is not as easy as with the use of English and reading as the way it is assessed is fairly subjective and can be within a point of what another examiner would put. The assessment scale for the writing section of Cambridge is broken up into 4 sections:

- Content
- Communicative achievement
- Organisation
- Language

For the content part, Cambridge states “All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed”. This means, to get full marks for content the candidate must answer the question fully and not include irrelevant information.

For the communicative achievement part, Cambridge states “The candidate uses the conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader’s attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas, as appropriate”. This means that the text is interesting enough to keep the reader’s attention and that the reader is informed of the ideas in the text with ease.



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For organisation, Cambridge states “Text is well organised and coherent, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect”. To complete with this requirement the candidate needs to organised the text in the correct format (letter, essay, email, review or article etc.) The candidate also needs to use a variety of connectives (5-8 approximately). It is important to write the text in a logical way, it needs to be easy to read and understand.

For language refers to grammar and vocabulary usage, Cambridge states “Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately. Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility. Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication”. To pass this part of the assessment the candidate needs to use a range of vocabulary (they are not looking for strange and rarely used words, they want the correct word for the context), the grammar use needs to include both simple and complex (modals, conditionals, passive and relative clauses) forms with few errors.



### **How to write an essay for the FCE**

An essay is the first part of the writing and it is obligatory. You need to answer the question with between 140-190 words. In the text you need to analyse a question using different points of view. It is a semi-formal text and should be impartial until the conclusion. What the examiner wants to see is a balanced argument that is both interesting and easy to read.

A good essay contains the following parts:

#### Introduction

Introduce the topic and say what you are going to talk about and capture the interest of the reader with a question, a fact or an extreme opinion.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph

The first point from the notes (you can mix points if they are related). This should be your main point, you must justify why it is the most important.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph

The 2<sup>nd</sup> point from the notes, you need to link it to the first. Explain why it is of secondary importance.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph

This is optional and can be linked to the second paragraphs. It explains the final point and links to the others.

#### Conclusion

A summary of what you have said in the main paragraphs and make your main point. It must be interesting and the reader should learn something from it.



### **What do they look for in a good essay?**

As I have said before, an essay at B2 level should be semi-formal. Try to avoid contractions (can't), phrasal verbs (be into) and colloquial phrases (awesome). The text needs to be the exact format that they have asked for (an essay with separate paragraphs), it should be easy to read and INTERESTING. If it is boring, it will get a bad grade.





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### Examples of essay questions and answers

*In English class you have been debating the advantages and disadvantages of studying English abroad.*

*Write an essay giving reasons for your opinions*

***Title: Many students spend a lot of money to study English in an English speaking country, but is it worth it?***

***Notes: write about***

- 1. Costs***
- 2. Teaching methods***
- 3. Immersion technique***

Many students spend a lot of money to study English in an English speaking country, but is it worth it?

To get started it is important to understand that learning English is of the utmost importance for people in Spain. Education experts say that the demand for a high level of English is only going to increase so we all need to find the best way of learning this language.

Firstly, we need to look at the cost of learning a language. We study English at school from the age of 3 but the level of classes and teaching is generally quite poor so our parents invest a lot of money in private language schools to help us through our exams. This is a costly process but we need to think, is it the quickest way to learn? Wouldn't it be better to go to an English speaking country?

Going abroad to study is a fantastic experience and we generally make a lot more progress than we would that if we stayed in our own country, but it is extremely expensive. Not all people can afford it and they need to try to get grants to be able to go. The advantages are obvious because we are surrounded by the language and we are forced to use it in real life situations. But it is important to find people to practice with who are willing to be patient and help us.

To summarise, it is a fantastic opportunity to go abroad to study but it is important to have a good teacher and to be focussed on learning or you could waste your time, and a lot of money.



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*In English class you have been discussing free time and how habits have changed nowadays from the past.*

*Write an essay giving reasons for your opinions*

***Is it easier to find opportunities to do what you enjoy in your free time than in the past?***

***Discuss the issues involved:***

- 1. Work.***
- 2. Facilities***
- 3. Time available to the general population.***

Can we use our free time better nowadays than in the past?

A lack of free time can be a cause of stress and therefore, health problems. On starting this essay, it is important to take into account the various factors that have changed our access to free time activities from that of past generations.

Firstly, we should mention that in general, people have never had so many opportunities to enjoy leisure activities as they do today. People generally had less time and money to do as they pleased as the standard of living was lower. But the way we work also has a negative influence as in this day and age there is far more pressure to succeed and we are discouraged from using our free time unproductively.

In spite of having a vast amount of facilities and money to our advantage we have more distractions that prevent us from doing what we enjoy. Due to the emergence of the internet and technological advances, it is all too easy for us to waste our spare time.

Given these points, I believe we have more time and money to do what we like in our free time than in the past but people do not necessarily use it in a better way.



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*In class you have had a group discussion about the education system in your country.*

*Write an essay giving reasons for your opinions*

***How could the education system be improved in your country?***

***Discuss:***

- 1. Funding***
- 2. Teaching methods***
- 3. (your own idea)***

How could the education system be improved in Spain?

Spain has one of the highest drop-out rates in high school in Europe so it is obvious that something is failing. To kick off this essay we are going to look at the current state of education and how to improve it.

On the one hand, Spain has just experience an extreme economic recession, therefore funding has been cut and this of course has lead to a lack of resources. Teachers will have had a bad time trying to maintain standards due to this fact. A simple increase of investment in education could help to make things better for both teachers and students.

On the other hand, teaching methods in Spain are said to be among the worst in the world. There needs to be an extreme change in the training process for teachers, especially to assimilate the recent emergence of bilingualism. Good teacher come out of a well-formed training system.

In brief, Changes need to be made at both government and grass roots levels to ensure that future generations have a bright future. Starting with funding teacher training so that teachers can change the face of the education system.



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**Example of a formal email/letter**

In class you have been asked to write a formal letter. You need to write an application letter for a language course.

You have seen the following advertisement in a language magazine:

**Ready to learn a language once and for all?**

**We are looking for language enthusiasts who are between 18-24 and want to try out our innovative new method. This is an online platform called [www.appf.edu.es](http://www.appf.edu.es).**

**If you can already speak a bit of English and you want to reach full fluency and competence in English, then this is the course for you. Send a letter of application to Marc Huckle at Imperial Street, Albacete or an email to [marc.h@appf.edu.es](mailto:marc.h@appf.edu.es)**

Please explain why you would be a good candidate and what experience you already have with language learning. We look forward to hearing from you.



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### Useful phrases for a **formal** letter:

#### Beginning:

With regards to the letter/email on...

With reference to your letter/email...

After having received your letter/email...

I received your address from ... and would like ...

Thank you very much for your letter/email on...

I have been given your contact details by... and I would like to...

In reply to your letter/email of...

#### Ending:

I hope to hear from you soon...

If you require any further information, feel free to contact me

Should you require anything else, do not hesitate in contacting me

Regards

Yours faithfully

Yours sincerely

(signature)



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Dear Mr Huckle,

With reference to your advertisement that caught my eye the other day as I was reading a language magazine 'Expert English', I would like to formally present my application to your course.

I am a 25 year old student who has been learning English for over 10 years, but I must admit that I have never found a method that has convinced me. I am stuck in the intermediate plateau and would thus like to finally become fluent.

Although I am a little older than the candidates that you have requested I feel I would be a great candidate as I already have a fairly good base level and I am really eager to carry on learning. I am a very tenacious person and I will persist until I reach the level required. I am also very good at following instructions so that will not be a problem.

If you require any further information, feel free to contact me

Yours sincerely

Thomas Shelby



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### Example of an informal email/a letter

*You have received this email from an English speaking friend (Marc)*

*From: Marc*

*Subject: Backpacking in Spain*

*Some friends of mine are going backpacking next month around Spain. They would like to learn about Spanish culture and its history.*

*Where should they begin the trip? What's the easiest way to get around? Where should they stay as they are on a tight budget?*

*Speak to you soon, Marc*

Format of an email/ a letter:

The format of a letter and an email are very similar. DO NOT INCLUDE THE ADDRESS. You need to know if it is formal or informal. If it is informal you CAN use contractions, in the formal you CAN'T. all the points should be put into separate paragraphs with one line between each one.

Beginning:

Thank for the letter you have received.

Middle:

A separate paragraph for each of the points/questions

Ending:

Say goodbye with one of the phrases



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Dear Marc,

This trip sounds amazing and I'm sure that your friends will have a great time. I have a few ideas for things to do.

The way I see it, the best place to begin the trip would be in Barcelona as the flights are cheap from where you live. Barcelona is like no other city, the culture there is amazing, and it has a great history and a great vibe. But if I were your friends, I'd brush up on my Catalan!

From there I would travel down the coast by bus to Valencia, Alicante and Murcia. The coast is beautiful and there are some amazing little villages along the coast. Valencia has great food and some cool museums. From Murcia it is easy to get a train to Andalusia, it is essential to visit Granada, Seville and Cordoba. The mix of Arabic and Christian culture is not to be missed. The best place to finish would be Madrid, Spain's Capital.

Regarding accommodation, the best option would be to stay in youth hostels, they normally only cost between €10 and €15 per night.

Let me know what you think and I look forward to speaking to you in the near future.

Marc





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### Example of an article

*You see this post on an English language website*

*The most useful bit of language learning advice*

*What is the best way to learn a language? Where did you learn about it? Who taught it to you?*

*Write an article about these questions. The best articles will be published on the site.*

Structure of an article:

Beginning:

Engage the reader and make them want to read more, you can begin with a question

Middle:

State your main points and relate them to personal experiences and opinions

Ending:

Summarize your main points but make an overall point to make the reader think they have learned something from reading the article



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Useful language:

### **Involving the reader**

- *Have you ever thought about...?*
- *How would you feel if ...?*
- *What would you think of...?*
- *Are you one of those people who ...?*
- *If the answer is ..., you should....*
- *What do you reckon to ...?*
- *What would live be like if...*
- *Just think for a moment...*
- *Just imagine...*

### The most useful bit of language learning advice

The most useful bit of advice I have ever received was from an online course. I had been studying English for years but with no success, I wasn't motivated to learn and I found it difficult. As it was so challenging for me; I started to give up until one day I came across this advice. Start with what you enjoy. But how can we make sure that we enjoy the language learning process?

The best way to learn a language is to relate it to yourself and your life. You need to think about what topics you are most likely to use and begin with those. If you study about something that doesn't capture your attention, it is difficult to learn. As I read recently on the course, "to learn something well, you need to enjoy it". This is very true with languages. The creator of the course has hit the nail on the head because not I use English every day. I try to think in English and I read in English all the time.

All in all, I reckon that languages are important to open your mind and be able to travel with ease. I'd recommend this course to everyone and I'm glad I found it.



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**Example of a review**

*You have seen this advertisement in a local magazine*

*Movie reviews wanted*

*Have you ever seen a movie that really surprised you?*

*Write a film review and talk about who the main character was? Why the movie surprised you?*

*And your opinion of the movie*

*The best reviews will be published in the magazine*

Structure of a review:

Beginning:

Start by stating which film you will review and why; it is a good idea to include a question

Middle:

Describe the film in brief, the plot and the characters, using interesting vocabulary

Ending:

To conclude, say who you would recommend the film to and why



## The departed: film review

Do you want to see an amazing movie about cops in the USA with an added twist? Well, the departed is a must see. It has an amazing cast with the likes of Jack Nicolson, Matt Damon and Leonardo di Caprio. It is hard to say who the main character is because there are various stories that run simultaneously throughout the movie.

The movie is surprising because (spoiler alert!) almost all of the main character die. In the movie there are undercover police officer infiltrated into the mafia and also many corrupt police officers on the payroll. Jack Nicolson is a mafia boss and he has an undercover policeman has one of his employees but he also has Matt Damon feeding him information from inside the police department. The movie is tense and will keep you on the edge of your seat until the end.

The movie would be suitable for anyone over the age of 18 due to its violent nature and it is a great movie to have a look into the crime world in Boston, USA. I would recommend it to everyone!



## Writing a report

A report is almost always written for someone superior (your boss, a teacher or a manager). It should be formal and very informative. Do not include unnecessary information.

Structure of the text:

A report should be concise and easy to understand. You must include a title, headings and also make sure that you answer the points in the question.

Useful phrases:

Making recommendations

- It would be a good idea to...
- Wouldn't it be better to...
- Why don't we...
- What about... ?
- How about... ?
- Shouldn't we... ?
- Let's...
- Why not... ?

*Our university has just released the new version of its official website. Write a report in response to your classmates' opinion of the site. Talk about the usage of the site, the information provided and the news section. Also make suggestions about how it could be improved.*



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### **Report on the University Website**

In this report I will discuss and analyse my classmates' opinions of the website and make some suggestions for improvements.

#### **The usage**

The site is really easy to use and all the students seem to be pleased with it. They were particularly happy with the links between sections and the fact that it was easy to find contact details for the adequate person in each teaching department.

#### **The information**

The information was of a good standard and very informative. People seemed impressed with how up to date it all was.

#### **News section**

The news section was very good and perfect for university students, just the type of thing that they like to talk about. If I have time, I will read it every day to find out about other student and new events.

#### **How to improve it**

All in all, there has been a request for more information about extra curricular activities and also where students can find discounts around the city. It would be a good idea to include a specific section for the latter.

To sum up, I'd say the new site has been a hit and that everyone will be making good use of it in the future.



**Key phrases for better writing:**

<b>STARTING:</b>	<b>CONCLUSION:</b>	<b>CONTRAST:</b>	<b>TIME:</b>
To get started	as can be seen	although this may be true	Firstly, secondly, thirdly
On starting this essay	in the final analysis	in contrast	in due time
Firstly	all things considered	different from	as long as
To begin with	as shown above	of course ..., but	as soon as
In the first place	in the long run	on the other hand	at the moment
until now	given these points	on the contrary	in good time
the first point I'd like to make is	as has been noted	at the same time	in the meantime
it is time to	in a word	in spite of	in a moment
I would like to start by	for the most part	even so / though	in ages
To start with	after all	be that as it may	whenever
To introduce the topic	in fact	then again	now that
To kick off this essay	in summary	above all	instantly
The first thing to mention is	in conclusion	in reality	without delay
As a starting point	in short	after all	all of a sudden
In the first part	in brief	although	at the present time
On the one hand	in essence	instead	from time to time
	to summarize	whereas	sooner or later
	on balance	despite	at the same time
	altogether	conversely	up to the present time
	overall	otherwise	at this instant
	by and large	however	first, second
	to sum up	rather	in time
	on the whole	nevertheless	prior to
	in any event	nonetheless	straightaway
	taking all of this into account	regardless	by the time
	all in all	as if/though	in this day and age



**Key phrases for expressing your opinion:**

In my opinion,...

In my eyes,...

To my mind,...

As far as I am concerned,...

Speaking personally,...

From my point of view,...

As for me / As to me,...

My view / opinion / belief / impression / conviction is that...

I hold the view that...

I would say that...

It seems to me that...

I am of the opinion that...

My impression is that...

I am under the impression that...

It is my impression that...

I have the feeling that...

My own feeling on the subject is that...

I have no doubt that...

I am sure / I am certain that...

I think / consider / find / feel / believe / suppose / presume / assume/reckon

I hold the opinion that... (I form / adopt an opinion.)

I dare say that...

I guess that...

I bet that....

I gather that...

It goes without saying that...





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### Key phrases for justifying your opinion:

Estas frases son flexibles y se puede modificar para ajustarlas al contexto

To begin, you can use these *basic (B1) phrases* to justify an opinion in English:

because...  
the reason is...  
the reason I believe that is...  
the facts suggest...  
the evidence shows...  
taking into account what I have seen...

You can justify your opinion more effectively by being more specific. Try some *intermediate (B2) phrases* like these:

The first reason I believe this is...  
The main reason I feel this way is...  
There are several reasons I believe this. The first is...

When you are not completely certain, you can try one of these more *advanced (C1) English phrases*:

I don't have any special reason for believing this. It just seems right to me that...  
I could be wrong as I have no special reason for believing this. I just feel this is right as...  
I'm not sure why I feel this way but I have reason to believe...

When you ARE certain, try one of these phrases:

There is a lot of evidence to support my point of view. For example...  
There are many facts in favour of my opinion. One such fact is...  
From my own personal experience, I am lead to believe...



### Connectors:

Cada conector tiene una función distinta. Ha de tener en cuenta la diferencias gramaticales de cada.

ADDING INFORMATION	CONTRAST
And, also, as well, in addition, besides, above all	However, but, although, on the other hand, despite, in spite of, even though, though, whereas
GIVING EXAMPLES	SIMILARITY
Such as, for example, like, for instance, as follows:	Similarly, equally, likewise, in the same way
REINFORCEMENT	RESULT
Also, furthermore, moreover, above all, not only... but also	So, therefore, as a result, because of this, consequently, thus, hence, in that case
DEDUCTION	SUMMARY
Otherwise, in other words, then, in that case	In conclusion, to sum up, in brief, therefore, to summarise
SEQUENCE	STATING THE OBVIOUS
Firstly, secondly, thirdly, lastly, next, after, to start with, to finish,	Obviously, clearly, naturally, of course, surely, after all

### Linking:

“Linking” refers to the way the writer relates their ideas together. It is essential to be able to form an argument and have a balanced piece of writing.

As I have said before...

With respect to the point on...

Regarding...

Like I have said...

In relation to...

Taking into account...



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Two of the answers will be corrected by a Cambridge/Trinity/EOI examiner, who will also offer advice on how to improve. Your answers should be 140-190 words long. You MUST do the essay and then choose one of the other options.

### Example essay question (part 1):

**Should famous sports stars earn more money than people in other professions, such as doctors, teachers or nurses?**

- **Time spent at work**
- **Training needed**
- **(your own idea)**

### Advice:

**Title** – The Candidate needs to include a title in the essay, article and review. You can use the question from the task or set your own title so that the reader knows the tone of the answer.

**Organisation** – You must write in the correct format. There is a need to write paragraphs. The introduction needs to capture interest and also explain how you will answer the question. The main content needs to be both interesting and informative and there is a need for a concise and useful conclusion.

**A balanced answer** – when writing an essay, it is better to remain impartial throughout the essay. You need to form a balanced argument and cover all of the points of view. Only include a personal opinion in the conclusion and then justify it.



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## Example questions (part 2):

### Email

You have seen an advertisement in the newspaper:

#### ***Students needed for social experiment***

***Birmingham City University is offering the opportunity to earn a little extra cash by participating in a series of social experiments. If you are ages 18-35 and are very open-minded, why not give it a go?***

- ***say why you would be a good candidate***
- ***discuss your availability***

**Send applications to [marc.h@appf.edu.es](mailto:marc.h@appf.edu.es)**

### Article

We invite our readers at [www.intercambioidiomasonline.com](http://www.intercambioidiomasonline.com) to give their opinions on:

Recycling in our local area

- Discuss the problem of rubbish and waste
- What can be done to encourage people to recycle?



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### **Review**

Apple has just released the I phone 8:

Write a review about it and who you would recommend it to.

### **Report**

The local authority in your city has just built a new cinema. Write a report about it and suggest how improvements could be made.