

# Writing Guide for the Cambridge B1 Preliminary Exam

## Section 1. Writing Exam Structure

### Exam format

The writing exam has two parts. In each part, you will have to write a text of approximately 100 words. The purpose of the exam is that you show you can use vocabulary and structure correctly.

Writing Part 1	Maximum of 20 marks available
Writing Part 2	Maximum of 20 marks available

Table 1. Exam format.

### Writing: 4-step process

In order to write appropriately you have to follow four fundamental steps:



Figure 1. Writing: 4-step process.

## Step 1. Identify key words

Identify...	Helps with...	Essential for high grade in...
... <b>whom</b> are you writing	Correct register	Communicative achievement
... <b>what</b> you are writing	Correct style	Communicative achievement
... <b>what</b> ideas you must include	Relevant content	Content

Table 2. Identifying key words.

## Step 2. Organise

Organisation is 25% of the grade in the writing paper. A plan is essential to organise the content into paragraphs that transmit your ideas clearly.

Here are three methods:

- Brainstorming related ideas for an article:

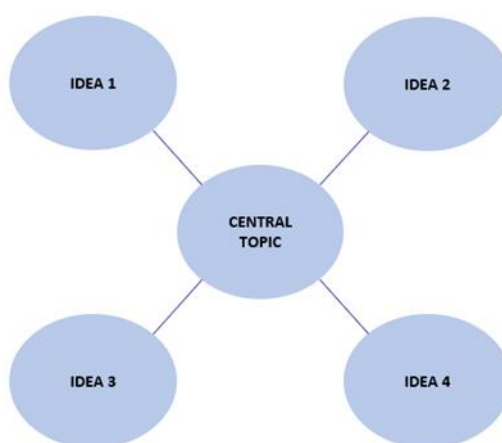


Figure 2. Brainstorming related ideas for an article.

► Listing paragraphs in a letter or email:

- Opening sentence.
- Key content 1.
- Key content 2 & 3.
- Key content 4.
- Closing sentence.

### Step 3. Write

**Write the recommended number of words:** You will NOT be directly penalised for writing more or less than the recommended word limit. However, it may negatively affect your grade in other areas.

► Writing that is too long:

- **Content.** You have included irrelevant content.
- **Language.** You have run out of time and are unable to check your work and correct mistakes.

► Writing that is too short:

- **Content.** You will lose points if you have not included all the points and developed your ideas sufficiently.

Tip: Before the exam, practise the recommended word limit in the time allowed.

### Step 4. Check

Stop writing and check your work: It is essential to check, check and check again to **maximise your grade in language.**

## Time management

You have 45 minutes to complete the reading and writing paper. We recommend you divide your time as follows:

Writing part 1		22 minutes
Writing part 2		22 minutes
Part 1. Email (100 words)		About 22 minutes
1. Read the question and identify content	1 minute	
2. Organise ideas	1 minute	
3. Write	15 minutes	
4. Check	5 minutes	
Part 2. Article or story (100 words)		About 22 minutes
1. Read question and identify content	1 minute	
2. Organise ideas	1 minute	
3. Write	15 minutes	
4. Check	5 minutes	

Table 3. Recommended time division to complete the reading and writing paper.

**Tip:** When practising, limit your time to that of the exam.

## Linking words and discourse markers

- ▶ You should use linking words to help connect and organise ideas.
- ▶ They are often used at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs.
- ▶ Do not over-use linking words, as this can seem artificial.
- ▶ Writing in PET often uses an informal style.
- ▶ Do not mix formal and informal linking words in the same piece of writing.

EXAMPLES OF INFORMAL LINKING WORDS AND DISCOURSE MARKERS:				
Listing	Adding more information	Contrasting information	Changing subject	Referencing
After...,	Also,	But...,	Anyway,	Since...,
Then,	Likewise,	Or	Anyhow,	So,
And	As well as...,	So,	At any rate,	Well...,
Next,	Just as...,	Though,	By the way,	About...,

Table 4. Examples of informal linking words and discourse markers.

Common positioning and punctuation of discourse markers:

- ▶ **Discourse markers at the beginning of a sentence.** Follow with a comma:
  - “Well, you know that pub I went to for my birthday...”
- ▶ **Discourse markers in the middle of a sentence.** Precede and follow with comma:
  - “I really don’t agree, and anyhow, what does it matter?”

## Section 2. Writing Exam Part 1

### Part 1. Email

#### **Reason for writing**

The task will give you the context, who you are writing to, why are you writing them and four key content points.

You must include the FOUR content points in a response of around 100 words.

In this task you will be required to demonstrate the ability to use functional language. For example, agreeing, disagreeing, giving an opinion, offering and explaining.

#### **Style**

You should aim to use a range of tenses, expressions and vocabulary, even if these contain some minor mistakes.

It is important to show the full range of your language ability and to be ambitious in your use of language.

Non-impeding errors, which do not affect communication, will not necessarily be penalised; e.g. spelling, grammar or punctuation errors. However, errors that interfere with communication will be treated more severely.

## Structure

<b>Opening</b>	Dear.../Hi...
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	Introduce idea + Key content 1
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	Key content 2, 3 & 4
<b>Closing</b>	Regards/Love,

Table 5. Structure of letters.

START	END
Dear...	<b>Regards</b> (email-neutral)
Hi there!	<b>Love</b> (family & best friends)

Table 6. Examples of beginning and ending a letter.

## Useful language

- ▶ Thanking someone: “Thank you so much for the...” / “thanks for the...! I love it!”
- ▶ Accepting an invitation/offer: “I would really love to...” / “Your invitation/offer sounds really great. I’d love to go/do...”
- ▶ Asking for help: “Can you...?” / “Would it be OK if you...?” / “Would you mind helping me...?” (formal)

## Remember



Figure 3. Writing: 4-step process.

- Step 1. Identify key words.

### Part 1

You **must** answer this question.

Write your answer in about **100 words** on the answer sheet.

#### Question 1

Read this email from your English-speaking friend Sandy and the notes you have made.

EMAIL

From: Sandy

Subject: Your visit!

Hi,

I'm so excited that you're coming to stay with me for a week!

On your first evening here, there's a rock concert in our town. Would you like to go to the concert or would you prefer us to relax at home?

Also, shall we go climbing in the mountains while you're here?

Let me know if you have any questions.

See you soon

Sandy

*Me too!*

*Say which I prefer*

*No, because ...*

*Ask Sandy ...*

Write your **email** to Sandy using **all the notes**.

Figure 4. Letters: Identify the figures.



► Step 2. Organise.



Figure 5. Letters: Organise ideas.

► Step 3. Write.

Sample answer:

Hi my dearest friend,

I'm excited about that as you.

Of course I can go. I don't prefer to listen only one genre of music for too long, so, if concert will annoy me, I will go, I suppose you don't mind. You know, I don't depend on kinds of music, I listen what I like to, but still, I don't mind about rock.

We can go for climbing for sure, but If you're meaning climbing by ropes and pickaxes, I'm out. I'm afraid of heights. If you have something on your mind please offer me.

I'm looking forward for next week.

Alex

Figure 6. Letters: Write.

► Step 4. Check.

Stop writing and check your work: It is essential to check, check and check again to **maximise your grade in language.**

Practice! Write an email of about 100 words in 22 minutes.

The diagram shows an email from John to Mark. The email text is enclosed in a box. Annotations with lines pointing to specific parts of the email are placed outside the box. The annotations are: 'Me too!' pointing to 'I hope you're well...', 'You decide!' pointing to 'I can be at your house by 3.00...', 'Explain the best way.' pointing to 'How do I get to your house from the station?', and 'Yes, some cake or biscuits ...' pointing to 'What would you like me to bring?'.

From: John  
Subject: Your Party

Hi,  
I hope you're well. I enjoyed talking to you earlier and getting your news.

I'm looking forward to coming to your party next weekend. I'll be travelling by train. How do I get to your house from the station?

I can be at your house by 3.00. I know that's a few hours before the party starts but I thought I could help you get everything ready. Is that OK?

You said you were hoping people would all bring some food to share. What would you like me to bring?

Write back soon!

Mark

Me too!

You decide!

Explain the best way.

Yes, some cake or biscuits ...

Figure 7. Letters: Practice.

Tip: Check you have included all 4 key content points for top marks.

## Grading: Part 1

A maximum of 20 marks is awarded for Part 1.

B1	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed	Uses the conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices.	Uses a range of everyday vocabulary appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis. Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a good degree of control. Errors do not impede communication.
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>			
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>			
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Produces text that communicates simple ideas in simple ways.	Text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words.	Uses basic vocabulary reasonably appropriately. Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control. Errors may impede meaning at times.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>		

Figure 8. Assessment scales Writing Part 1. Source: Cambridge English: Preliminary. Handbook for teachers (2020, p. 26).

A maximum of 5 points are awarded for each area:

► Language (25% 0-5 points):

- Use a varied range of structures.
- Accurate language.
- Be ambitious.

- ▶ Communicative achievement (25%. 0-5 points):
  - Appropriate register and tone.
  - Interesting writing.
  - Communicates ideas clearly.
  
- ▶ Organisation (25% 0-5 points):
  - Paragraphing makes sense.
  - Ideas in a clear and logical order.
  - Good use of linking devices.
  
- ▶ Content (25% 0-5 points):
  - All the points are covered and developed in sufficient detail.
  - All content is relevant.

## Section 3. Writing Exam Part 2

You will have to choose between an article or a story (100 words).

### Story

#### Reason for writing

- ▶ Telling a short story.
- ▶ You will be given the first line.

#### Style

- ▶ Use informal language.
- ▶ Pay attention to verb tenses: past simple, past continuous, past perfect...
- ▶ Use time phrases, e.g. then, after that, meanwhile...

#### Structure

<b>Title</b>	Get reader's attention
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	Introduce idea
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	Climax
<b>Paragraph 3</b>	End

Table 7. Writing a story: Structure.

## Useful language

A story has three key stages: start, climax and end. Use discourse markers to indicate a change of state, as can be seen in figure 8.

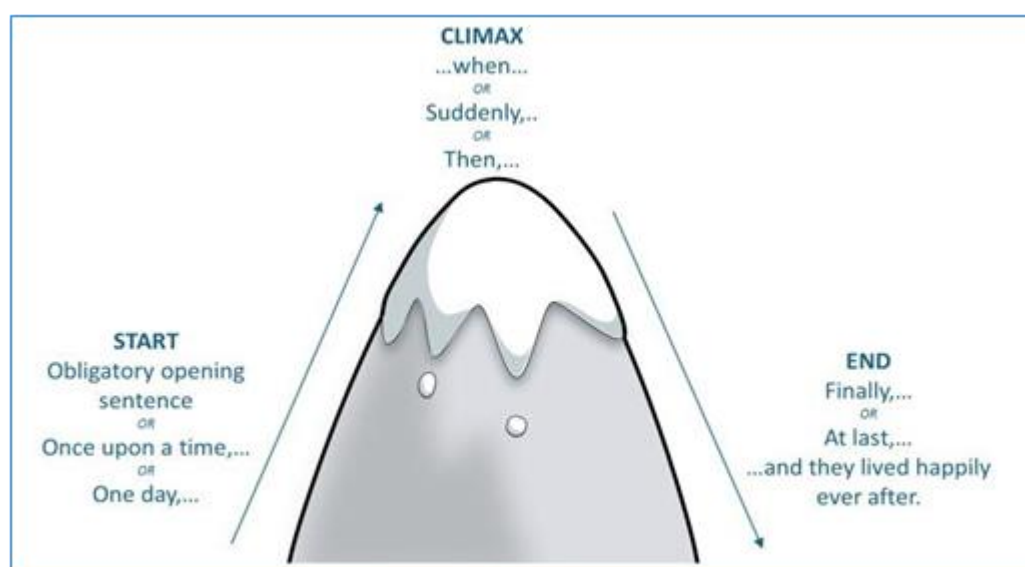


Figure 9. Examples of discourse markers in a short story.

## Remember



Figure 10. Writing stories: 4-step process.

- Step 1. Identify key words.

You will be given the first sentence of the story:

### Question 3

Your English teacher has asked you to write a story.

Your story must begin with this sentence.

*As the plane flew lower, Lou saw the golden beaches of the island below.*

Write your story.

Figure 11. Writing stories: 4-step process, Step 1.

#### ► Step 2. Organise.

	IDEA
Start	As the plane flew lower, Lou saw the golden beaches of the island below. He was surprised and a bit afraid.
Climax	The gold stones turned grey when he took them.
Developing idea	He saw golden fruits but did not take them. He took some photos to show them to scientists.
End	He became an explorer. He became rich and after that he had a beautiful life.

Table 8. Writing stories: 4-step process, Step 2.

#### ► Step 3. Write.

Sample answer:

As the plane flew lower, Lou saw the golden beaches of the island below. He was surprised and a bit afraid of this fact.

The plane sat on the beach and Lou stood on the beach. Everything was made of gold including palms and stones on the island. He wanted to take some stones with him to be rich but as he got one of them the stones started getting gray. Lou got nervous and he decided to put the stone on the beach again. The stones turned to gold.

Then he entered deeper to the beach. He saw some golden fruits, but he didn't pick because he knew the result. He took some photos of the beach and showed them to the scientists after he arrived home. He became an explorer. Lou became rich and after that he had a beautiful life.

Figure 12. Writing stories: 4-step process, Step 3.

► Step 4. Check.

Check your work: It is essential to check, check and check again to **maximise your grade in language**.

Practice! Write a story of about 100 words in 22 minutes.

- Your teacher has asked you to write a story.
- Your story must begin with this sentence:

**Last night I dreamt I was a giant**

- Write your story in about 100 words on your answer sheet.

Figure 13. Writing stories: 4-step process, Step 4.

Tip: Use linking words to help organise your story.

## Article

### Reason for writing

You will read an announcement from a magazine or a website. This gives the topic that you must write about. For example, there may be a couple of questions that you should respond to.



## Style

- ▶ Use catchy title to attract the reader's interest.
- ▶ Use informal language.
- ▶ Address readers directly.
- ▶ Use colloquial expressions.
- ▶ Include humour and/or rhetorical questions to create interest.
- ▶ Use exclamation marks where appropriate.

## Structure

<b>Title</b>	Get reader's attention
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	Introduction
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	Idea 1 (and 2 if there is one)
<b>Paragraph 3</b>	Conclusion

Table 9. Writing articles: Structure.

## Useful language

Remember to write a title and structure your article using discourse markers.

## Remember



Figure 14. Writing articles: 4-step process.

- Step 1. Identify key words.

You see this notice on an English-language website.

**Articles wanted!**

**FILMS**

What kind of films do you enjoy?

Do you prefer watching them at the cinema or at home? Why?

**Write an article answering these questions and we will put it on our website!**

Write your **article**.

Figure 15. Writing articles: 4-step process, Step 1.

- Step 2. Organise.

	IDEA
Title	FILMS
Paragraph 1	Many types of films. I enjoy romantic comedies and musical films
Paragraph 2	I prefer going to the cinema because of the sound effects and the screens
Paragraph 3	When my parents do not want to go to the cinema, I have to watch the film at home

Table 19. Writing articles: 4-step process, Step 2.

► Step 3. Write.

Sample answer:

Films

There are many types of films, most adults like to watch romance films and most children likes to watch cartoons but for me, I like to watch romance and musical films.

I prefer watching them at the cinema because of the sound effects and the screens are so much bigger than our house one, sometimes the film even look so real. When you are going to an outing with your friends, you can buy the food and the drinks there but I don't like to eat the popcorn there.

However, when my parents don't want to go to the cinema, I have no choice but to watch it at home.

Figure 16. Writing articles: 4-step process, Step 3.

► Step 4. Check.

Check your work: It is essential to check, check and check again to **maximise your grade in language**.

► Practice! Write an article of about 100 words in 22 minutes.

You see this notice on an English language website:

**Food**

What kind of food do you enjoy eating?

Do you prefer eating at home or in a restaurant? Why?

Write an article answering these questions and we will put it on our website.

**Tip: Make sure you answer all the questions.**

## Part 2: Grading

B1	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed	Uses the conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices.	Uses a range of everyday vocabulary appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis. Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a good degree of control. Errors do not impede communication.
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0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>		

Figure 17. Assessment scales Writing Part 2. Source: Cambridge English: Preliminary. Handbook for teachers (2020, p. 26).

A maximum of 5 points are awarded for each area:

► Language (25% 0-5 points):

- Use a varied range of structures.
- Accurate language.
- Be ambitious.

- ▶ Communicative achievement (25%. 0-5 points):
  - Appropriate register and tone.
  - Interesting writing.
  - Communicates ideas clearly.
  
- ▶ Organisation (25% 0-5 points):
  - Paragraphing makes sense.
  - Ideas in a clear and logical order.
  - Good use of linking devices.
  
- ▶ Content (25% 0-5 points):
  - All the points are covered and developed in sufficient detail.
  - All content is relevant.

## References

Cambridge English Language Assessment. (2020). *Cambridge English: Preliminary PET. Handbook for teachers*. CUP.