

B1 Writing

Cambridge Masterclass

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To infinity and beyond.

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Cambridge B1 Preliminary Writing

Welcome to this book on the Cambridge B1 Preliminary Writing paper. B1 Preliminary is one of the exams in the series provided by Cambridge Assessment – part of the University of Cambridge. It is the second in the range of tests they provide in General English:

A2	Key (KET)
B1	Preliminary (PET)
B2	First (FCE)
C1	Advanced (CAE)
C2	Proficiency (CPE)

The references next to each test refer to the CEFR Level (Common European Framework of Reference), and show the language level of each test.

For CEFR B1 Writing, you will be able to:

- communicate your ideas in writing on everyday topics
- write clearly and in some detail
- explain your ideas about a situation
- recognise the reader of texts and use a suitable register
- show different grammatical structures
- show suitable vocabulary for the tasks set
- recognise the functional language needed in tasks.

How does the test work?

You can take the B1 Preliminary exam on a computer or on paper. The content is the same for both forms of the test. The B1 Preliminary Writing paper gives you the opportunity to show your language skills. The topics of tasks are chosen so that they are relevant to the typical student taking this exam, so you should find that you have enough ideas to write about. Each question will guide you by identifying the context, the purpose for writing and the target reader. It is important to remember that you aren't being tested on the subject

content of the tasks. So, if the topic of the Part 1 question, for example, is education, you aren't expected to be an expert about this topic. The test format is:

Time allowed	45 minutes
Number of parts	2
Number of questions	Part 1: one compulsory question Part 2: one optional question from a choice of two
Task types	essay, article, story
Length	each answer should be about 100 words long

Task type 1: Email

Part 1 (Question 1) of the Writing paper is always an email written in reply to an email you have been sent. There will be four 'notes' on the side of the email that will guide you in writing your email in reply.

EMAIL

From: Tom

Subject: New laptop

Hi!

You bought a new laptop recently didn't you?

My laptop finally stopped working yesterday and I need some help! I went to Jenner's to look at them but they were so many to choose from! Did you buy yours there?

Why did you buy the laptop you did? I only need mine for college work at the moment but some laptops have lots of cool things on them. I don't want to miss out on anything good!

Would you have time next week to meet up so I can look at your laptop and see what I need?

Thanks, Tom

Yes...

Tell Tom

No, because...

Suggest...

You must include information for each of the notes provided, and this will be made clear in the question. For example:

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

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

It's a good idea to tick these off on the question paper as you include them to make sure that you don't miss anything. You can get used to thinking about these notes by recognising what you are expected to do.

Look at these examples:

Email content	Note	What you need to do
Shall we go to football?	<i>Great idea!</i>	Agree that this is a good idea (but try to use different words).
Shall we go to football?	<i>No, because...</i>	Here you need to disagree with the writer and say why you disagree.

As you can see, the same content in the email might have different notes, so it's very important that you think about what the notes are telling you to do.

Here are some more examples of notes:

Email content	Note	What you need to do
We could go for pizza or eat at my house.	<i>Tell Maria...</i>	Tell Maria which of the two options is best.
Have I forgotten anything?	<i>Yes...</i>	Tell the writer that they have forgotten something, and say what it is. You can't say that they haven't forgotten anything with this note.
I don't know where to go in the evening.	<i>Suggest...</i>	Make a suggestion of a place the writer could go.
If you have any questions, let me know.	<i>Ask Mrs Jenkins...</i>	You need to ask a question that is relevant to the email content here.

An email can be organised in different ways, and some of the notes can be covered quickly while others will need more words to reply. Emails to a friend may be less formal, and emails to a teacher should be semi-formal and polite. Remember, you don't have to tell the truth! The examiners won't know, so if you don't have experience or an opinion you can make something up.

Task type 2: Article

An article is usually written for an English-language magazine or website. Therefore, the reader will have a similar background to you.

Articles wanted!

What do you do to keep healthy?

Is thinking about what you eat more important than
how much you exercise?

What are your recommendations for keeping healthy?

The best articles will be published on our website in our
health feature next month.

Imagine a group of your friends reading your article. An article should have some opinion or comment that the reader will be interested in reading. A title is useful to attract attention, and it's good to try to give a strong ending to leave the reader with something to think about. The grammar and vocabulary that you need for an article will depend on the question. Look at the examples in this book on pages 33 and 41. The first one could be written in the present tense (you could use other tenses too), but the second one definitely needs to be written in the past tense. The vocabulary will also depend on the question, and you should think about what good vocabulary you know for the topic.

Task type 3: Story

A story is usually written for a teacher. The question will give you a sentence to begin your story with. It's a good idea to underline or highlight the important words that will make sure your story fits with this sentence. For example:

This tells you that it is a girl in the story, so remember to use the right pronouns: she, her, hers.

This tells you that she didn't leave the key in the grass. Think about what she did with it, where she went, etc.

Kate saw a gold key in the grass and she picked it up.

This tells you the object. You should think about what the key is for and how Kate felt when she saw it.

This tells you where the key was – maybe a park or the countryside. This will help with the setting for your story.

Remember that your story needs to be linked with the ideas in the sentence in the question, but you aren't being tested on your creative writing – the story doesn't need to be exciting. You only have about 100 words to write your story, so it is best to keep your ideas simple.

You will need to use past tenses in a story, and the best B1 Preliminary stories use a range of different tenses: past simple, past continuous and past perfect. If you decide to choose the story question in the exam, think about how confident you are with this grammar. Good stories also use a range of different time phrases to link ideas. For example: then, afterwards, later that day, in the end, etc. These help to make a story easy to read.

How to use this book

The main section of this book focuses on each task type individually, explaining its characteristics and providing guidance on how to plan a response to an example question.

There are two example questions for each task type. For each task-type question, two responses from different candidates are provided. One response is very good and the other is less good, identifying areas that the candidate could improve on. There are detailed comments on each response, and a breakdown of the marks that the response could get in the exam. You should read these responses and commentary before you write your own response to the question. When you have written your response, look back at the comments and the mark scheme, and think about what you did well and also how you could have done better.

<p>Student Response A</p> <p>Dear Mrs Jenkins,</p> <p>Firstly, thank you for planning the trip. I think it will be great. I wanted to go to the National Theatre but didn't have time so far. I am sure it will be helpful and very good for my studies as I am studying drama, as you know. I hope I will meet some famous actors there. That would make my day!</p> <p>I think The Seasons is a well-known show which has won many prizes. It would be best to go to the show in the evening so we have lots of time to relax and maybe have something to eat before.</p> <p>I think the only thing for me to know is how much the cost is.</p> <p>Sidney</p>	<p>As this is a letter to the student's teacher, this is a suitable opening.</p> <p>This is a strong, complex sentence that shows the student's language ability well.</p> <p>The student has used a very good phrase here to show that they are excited about the visit. It communicates this well.</p> <p>The email is divided into separate paragraphs with a clear topic for each paragraph. This is good organisation of the email.</p> <p>The student ends their email with content for the last note. They have covered all of the content well.</p>	<p>Content</p> <p>The student has covered all of the information needed from the notes. It is well supported by the detail they have added (e.g. 'I am sure it will be helpful and very good for my studies as I am studying drama.'). The reader would have all the information they need from this email.</p> <p>5 / 5</p> <p>Communicative achievement</p> <p>This email communicates very well. It is semi-formal, as the student is writing to their teacher and they need to be polite but give all the information needed. The student opens the email nicely by thanking the teacher for organising the trip, which sets a good tone.</p> <p>5 / 5</p> <p>Organisation</p> <p>There is excellent organisation. The student has used paragraphs to separate out different points of the email. They also use linking words like 'and' and 'but'. In addition, some of the sentences they use link ideas using grammar (e.g. relative clause: 'I think The Seasons is a well-known show which has won many prizes.').</p> <p>5 / 5</p> <p>Language</p> <p>Both the grammar and the vocabulary are strong. The student has used different tenses in a good way for the task (e.g. 'I think it will be great. I wanted to go...'). This helps to show their range of language. There is good vocabulary, and sometimes the student has been ambitious (e.g. 'a well-known show'; '...make my day!'). The writing isn't always totally correct, but errors are often above the level of the text (e.g. 'many prizes' – this word should be 'awards', but the meaning is clear).</p> <p>5 / 5</p> <p>Total marks: 20 / 20</p> <p>This is a very strong response to the question. The reader of the email would be fully informed and would have all the information they need. The student shows a good level of language and is very accurate. The tone is appropriate for an email to the student's teacher.</p>
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Preparing for the exam

It is important that you plan your time in the exam. You will need to complete both tasks within the 45 minutes.

It is sensible to divide your time equally between the two tasks: about 20 minutes each. You should make sure that you:

- **Read** all of the questions carefully to be certain you understand what they mean.
- **Plan** your writing.
- **Write** your response according to your plan.
- **Check** your writing for errors.

Read the questions

Read the Part 1 question carefully, and make sure that you understand what each of the four notes refers to. Read both of the Part 2 questions. There will be two questions, and you will need to choose one. When making your choice, you will need to think about the task type, the topic and the language that you will need.

It is good advice to spend time thinking about each question before you start writing. If you start one question and then realise that you don't feel confident about the ideas or language you need, you may need to change question.

Plan your writing

It is tempting to start writing as soon as you decide what question to answer, but spending some time planning is very sensible.

Candidates plan their writing in different ways, but the following is an example of a plan for the story question on page 8:

Para 1: walking to school | do something more exciting!

Para 2: key to special box | bank | box full of gold coins | felt shaky |
grabbed gold | ran

Para 3: bought big house | good life | scared money from criminal!

Here, the candidate has noted down some ideas and good vocabulary to use, and has decided what will go in each paragraph.

Write your response

Use your notes to assemble your ideas from your plan into a well-organised piece of writing with a suitable tone and good, accurate language. With good planning technique, this will be easier. Of course, you will also be thinking about the functions, grammar and vocabulary that you considered before you started to produce your plan. This is the best way to make sure that you show the examiner as much of your language ability as possible.

It is a useful skill to paraphrase language that you find in the task. So, if the task says 'Is it better to buy things online or visit shops?', you could answer by saying 'I think it's better to buy things online.' But it would be better to paraphrase and say something like 'In my opinion, shopping on the internet isn't as much fun as going to the high street or shopping mall'. You show the examiner that you know more language this way.

What language do you need?

There are three things to consider when you have read the questions. There is some overlap between them, but it is still a good idea to think about all three.

1. What functions does the task need?

For example, do you need to give your opinion, explain something or give a recommendation?

2. What grammar can you use in the task?

This may be linked to the functions of the question. For example, if you are asked to give a suggestion, you'll be able to use modal verbs (e.g. 'You could go to...').

However, often the grammar you use will be your choice. If you know that you are confident when using conditional sentences, for example, can you include one in your response? If you know that you don't feel confident about using relative clauses, how can you avoid trying to use one?

3. What vocabulary is related to the task topic and links in with the functions?

This will depend on the question and the topic, but you should think about what phrases you can use to make sure that there is variety. For example, it is better not to start each idea with 'I think...'. You could use 'In my opinion...' or 'My view is...' as alternatives to make sure that you show the examiner a good range of different phrases.

Other vocabulary that you decide to use will be related to the topic. If the task is set in a park, for example, what vocabulary (e.g. *playground, gate, café, children*, etc.) might be good to use?

You can also think about which words or phrases you want to use to link ideas together. Using linking devices (e.g. *and, but, however, on the other hand, as opposed to*, etc.) helps with the organisation of your writing and makes it easier for the reader to understand it.

Check your writing

You should always leave five minutes to read through each response you write. Check that you haven't left anything important out, but also check the language for errors. For example:

Have you used the right tenses? Are there any spelling errors?

It's a good idea to make your own checklist while you prepare for the B1 Preliminary Writing paper. It will help you to think about what to check for, and also to think about mistakes that you often make.

Here is a suggested checklist to use, but it's a good idea to add things that you know you sometimes make mistakes with. What would you add to this checklist?



- Does your response cover all of the content points in the task?
- Is your response in the right style for the task type?
- Have you used the right register for the task?
- Have you used paragraphs to separate different ideas?
- Have you used linking devices correctly?
- Have you got a range of linking devices?
- Are all tenses correct?
- Have you used articles with nouns where needed?
- Are the prepositions correct?
- What about errors you've made in the past?

The assessment criteria

Each piece of writing is marked against four assessment criteria, each carrying a maximum of five marks.

Content

This criterion focuses on whether you have answered the question and whether the reader would have all the information they need. You must make sure that you identify what the question is asking you to do, and plan your answer so that you stay on the topic. In Part 1 there are four notes that you must cover. In Part 2 you must identify what you will need to write about from the questions.

Max. 5 marks

Communicative achievement

This criterion focuses on how well you communicate with the reader. This includes whether your writing is suitable for the task you are writing and that it also involves register. Register means whether your writing is more formal (e.g. writing for someone you don't know or your teacher) or less formal (e.g. writing for your classmates or a friend).

Max. 5 marks

Organisation

This criterion focuses on how your ideas are organised into paragraphs, if these are needed. It includes the use of discourse markers (e.g. *and*, *but*, *so* at a basic level; and *therefore*, *despite this* at a higher level). It also includes things like how pronouns are used to refer to nouns to avoid repetition. For example: 'He never liked school and hated going there.' In this sentence, using the word 'there' means that the student doesn't repeat the word 'school'.

Max. 5 marks

Language

This criterion focuses on vocabulary and grammar. It isn't just about using vocabulary and grammar without making mistakes. It also considers whether your writing uses more difficult grammar and more unusual words and phrases. It is sometimes hard to focus on both, and, of course, it's great if you don't make any mistakes! However, if this means that your language is very simple, it may mean that you can't get to the top marks here.

Max. 5 marks

When all four criteria have been assessed your total mark is given out of 20.

Planning Guide

Write the question you are going to answer below, and underline or highlight the important words that will help you to focus your response.

What **functions** does the task need?

What **grammar** could you use?

What **vocabulary** could you use?

Bring your ideas together in a plan, and think about the organisation and register you need.

- How many paragraphs do you need? How will you link ideas?
- Who is your reader? What is your relationship to them?
- Do you need to use more formal or more informal language?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for students to write their plan. It occupies the central portion of the page.

Text type 1: Email

In Part 1 of the Writing paper you will have to write an email. **Remember:**

- You must include all four points from the notes.
- Think about how to use your own words instead of the words in the question email.
- Make sure that you identify the person the email is being written for.
- Think about how formal or informal your email should be.

Look at the following question. **Think about:**

- what you could be studying that could be linked to this theatre trip
- why an afternoon or evening would be better
- what question you could ask.

Read this email from your English teacher and the notes you have made.

	<p>From: Mrs Jenkins Subject: Class 9B trip</p>	
Great!	<p>I am planning a trip for our class to the National Theatre to have a tour next month.</p> <p>I think it will be really interesting and helpful for your studies. I hope you think so too.</p>	Yes, because...
Say which and why	<p>The theatre has said we can have tickets for one of their shows too, which is very kind of them. We can see their show 'The Seasons' either in the afternoon at 2.30pm or the evening at 7.30pm. Which time do you think is best?</p> <p>If you have any questions or if there is any further details you need, please let me know.</p>	
	Mrs Jenkins	Ask Mrs Jenkins

Write your **email** to Mrs Jenkins using **all the notes**.

Read the following sample answers and see how two students have answered this task.

Student Response A

Dear Mrs Jenkins,

Firstly, thank you for planning the trip. I think it will be great. I wanted to go to the National Theatre but didn't have time so far. I am sure it will be helpful and very good for my studies as I am studying drama, as you know. I hope I will meet some famous actors there. That would make my day!

I think The Seasons is a well-known show which has won many prizes. It would be best to go to the show in the evening so we have lots of time to relax and maybe have something to eat before.

I think the only thing for me to know is how much the cost is.

Sidney

As this is a letter to the student's teacher, this is a suitable opening.

This is a strong, complex sentence that shows the student's language ability well.

The student has used a very good phrase here to show that they are excited about the visit. It communicates this well.

The email is divided into separate paragraphs with a clear topic for each paragraph. This is good organisation of the email.

The student ends their email with content for the last note. They have covered all of the content well.

Content

The student has covered all of the information needed from the notes. It is well supported by the detail they have added (e.g. 'I am sure it will be helpful and very good for my studies as I am studying drama.'). The reader would have all the information they need from this email.

5 / 5

Communicative achievement

This email communicates very well. It is semi-formal, as the student is writing to their teacher and they need to be polite but give all the information needed. The student opens the email nicely by thanking the teacher for organising the trip, which sets a good tone.

5 / 5

Organisation

There is excellent organisation. The student has used paragraphs to separate out different points of the email. They also use linking words like 'and' and 'but'. In addition, some of the sentences they use link ideas using grammar (e.g. relative clause: 'I think The Seasons is a well-known show which has won many prizes.').

5 / 5

Language

Both the grammar and the vocabulary are strong. The student has used different tenses in a good way for the task (e.g. 'I think it will be great. I wanted to go...'). This helps to show their range of language. There is good vocabulary, and sometimes the student has been ambitious (e.g. 'a well-known show'; '...make my day!'). The writing isn't always totally correct, but errors are often above the level of the text (e.g. 'many **prizes**' – this word should be 'awards', but the meaning is clear).

5 / 5

Total marks: 20 / 20

This is a very strong response to the question. The reader of the email would be fully informed and would have all the information they need. The student shows a good level of language and is very accurate. The tone is appropriate for an email to the student's teacher.

Student Response B

Hi!

It's so great that we can plan a trip for our class to go to the National Theatre to have a tour next month! It will be really interesting and helpful because I like theatre a lot.

Is good to go at either time to see the show but in the pm at 2.30 is better. We can have the tour in am and have lunch after. Then we can see the wonderful show with tickets. My friend, she tell me that this show is very nice and I want to see it so much!

love

Lola

This opening is more suitable for an email to a friend than to a teacher. It is better to open the email with 'Dear...' like Student A has done.

The student has made some basic errors with language. It is important to check your writing to look for mistakes like this missing subject.

The student has used a lot of exclamation marks in their email, and this means that they stop having an impact.

The last point in the notes isn't included, so the student hasn't covered all of the required content.

Remember, you must cover all four content points in the notes. You can tick them off on the question paper as you cover them to make sure that you don't forget anything.

Content

The content that is included is all relevant. The student has covered the first three notes. However, they haven't asked the teacher a question as the fourth note asked them to. Therefore, the task hasn't been completed and the student can't get full marks for this criterion.

3 / 5**Communicative achievement**

The email communicates with the teacher but not completely appropriately. Some parts are too informal, including the opening and the closing. This is more suitable for an email to a friend. The overuse of exclamation marks also doesn't help here. To get good marks for communication, it's important to remember who you are writing to.

3 / 5**Organisation**

The email has two paragraphs and there is some other organisation, such as using 'and' and 'but'. This is quite simple, and as the student has copied a lot of the sentences from the question they haven't been able to show the examiner their skill in this area very much.

3 / 5**Language**

The student has copied quite a lot of the text from the question email. It is important to try to use your own words. Where the student has used their own words, there are some errors and some expressions that aren't quite right. However, the email can be understood, and these errors don't stop the reader getting the message.

3 / 5**Total marks: 12 / 20**

This response is placed in the middle of the marks available. Most, but not all of the content points are included. The student could have scored better if they had included everything. The reader would not have all the information they need to be informed. The fact that the student has copied so much content from the question means that there is less of their own language to make a judgement on.

Now have a go at writing a response to this question yourself.

Read this email from your English teacher and the notes you have made.

From: Mrs Jenkins
Subject: Class 9B trip

I am planning a trip for our class to the National Theatre to have a tour next month.

I think it will be really interesting and helpful for your studies. I hope you think so too.

The theatre has said we can have tickets for one of their shows too, which is very kind of them. We can see their show 'The Seasons' either in the afternoon at 2.30pm or the evening at 7.30pm. Which time do you think is best?

If you have any questions or if there is any further details you need, please let me know.

Mrs Jenkins

Great!

Yes, because...

Say which and why

Ask Mrs Jenkins

Write your **email** to Mrs Jenkins using **all the notes**.

Highlight or underline the important words.

Outline plan:

Refer to the Planning Guide on page 14 for guidance on how to plan your response.

