

B2 Writing

Cambridge Masterclass

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Cambridge B2 First Writing

Welcome to this book on the Cambridge B2 First Writing paper. B2 First is one of the exams in the series provided by Cambridge Assessment – part of the University of Cambridge. It is in the middle of 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 B2 Writing, you will be able to:

- communicate your ideas in writing on a range of topics
- write clearly and in some detail
- explain your viewpoint and give advantages and disadvantages
- recognise the reader of texts and use a suitable register
- show a good range of different grammatical structures
- show a good range of suitable vocabulary for the tasks set
- recognise the functional language needed in tasks.

How does the test work?

You can take the B2 First exam on a computer or on paper. The content is the same for both forms of the test. The B2 First Writing papers give 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	1 hour 20 minutes
Number of parts	2
Number of questions	Part 1: one compulsory question Part 2: one optional question from a choice of three
Task types	article, informal email, essay, letter of application, report, review
Length	each answer should be 140–190 words long

Task types

There are six possible task types in the B2 First Writing paper.

Essay

Part 1 (Question 1) of the Writing paper is always an essay written for your teacher, and the start of the question wording is always the same:

In your English class you have been talking about [topic]. Now, your English teacher has asked you to write an essay.

Write your essay using all the notes and giving reasons for your point of view.

There will be two prompts or points given for you to include in your response, and a third prompt for you to include something based on your own ideas or experience. You must add something for this point. 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.

An essay can be organised in different ways, but it is useful to think of having one idea or focus per paragraph, and a short introduction and conclusion. Essays are written in a semi-formal register as you are writing for your teacher.

Email

You may be asked to write an email in the B2 First Writing paper. Email tasks are informal and are usually written to a friend or someone you study with. The question will tell you what to include in your email, and you will need to make sure that you include everything. Often you will need to include information about yourself in emails or your opinion on something.

Letter of application

This task will be to reply to a notice or advertisement to apply for something. It could be an application for a job or a course, but the question will make this clear. Remember when you write your letter to have a suitable opening and close, for example 'Dear Mrs Linton,' and 'Kind regards...', or something similar.

Article

An article is usually written for an English-language magazine or website. The idea is that the reader will have things in common with you. 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.

Report

A report is usually written for a teacher or school principal, or a specific group such as the members of an English club. Reports are factual and have a clear purpose as someone has asked you to write the report. They can include opinions about the topic too. Report questions usually ask you to describe something that has happened, and to make suggestions for changes or recommendations. They are typically quite formal.

Review

A review is usually written for an English-language website or magazine. You will be asked to give your opinion about something or somewhere. The aim of a review is for other people to decide if they want to try what you are reviewing, so you will be describing and recommending something. The reader doesn't have to follow your recommendations of course. Reviews are less formal than a report.

How to use this book

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

Preparing for the exam

It is important that you plan your time in the exam. You will need to complete both tasks within the 80 minutes. It is sensible to divide your time equally between the two tasks: about 40 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 identify the two given points to include and think about what your third point could be. Read all of the Part 2 questions. There will be three 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. For example, think about a question that asks for an article to be written about social media. If you know lots of nice vocabulary about social media, then this could be a good choice. Another question might require a report to be written about doing work experience and for recommendations. You may need to use modal verbs for this. If you aren't very sure about using modal verbs, this might not be a good question to answer.

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 essay question on page 6:

Intro: addicted to social media | use it every day | manage without? | no!

Para 1: when younger | nagging mother | she didn't approve | generation gap | changed her mind

Para 2: make friends on SM | keep in touch | would feel isolated | normal nowadays

Concl: try to take away my SM? | no!

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 'Could you live without social media?', you could answer by saying 'I couldn't live without social media.' But it would be better to paraphrase and say something like 'I'm quite sure I wouldn't be able to manage without my Facebook account!'

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 recommendation, you'll be able to use modal verbs (e.g. 'You should remember 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?

If you are giving recommendations in the task, for instance maybe in a report, 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 about social

media, for example, what vocabulary (e.g. *online, download, browse, click, followers*, 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 B2 First Writing paper. It will help you to think about what to check for, and also to think about mistakes that you know you often can 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 three content points that you must cover: two that are given and one that you must add. In Part 2 questions you must identify what you will need to write about from the question.

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 less formal (e.g. writing for your classmates).

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?

Plan:

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

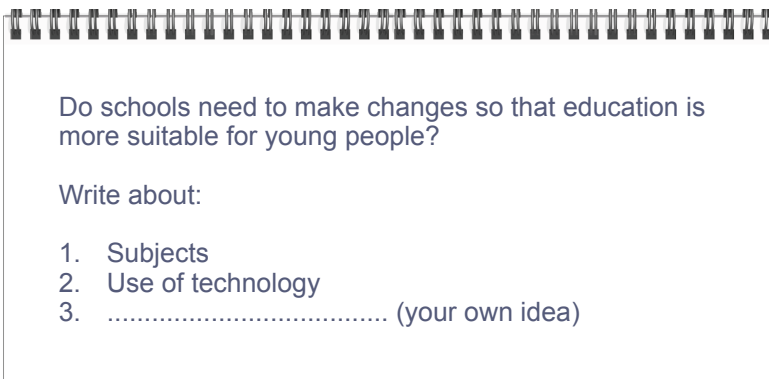
- You must answer this question.
- The topic will be something general, and you won't need expert knowledge.
- The reader will be your teacher – try to imagine them reading this.
- You must include the two points given in the notes and add your own idea.

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

- your own experience about what you would like to study
- good words related to technology that you could include
- what your own idea could be. You must include this to complete the task, and it needs to be different from the two points given.

In your English class you have been talking about education. Now your English teacher has asked you to write an essay.

Write an essay using **all** your notes and giving reasons for your point of view.



Do schools need to make changes so that education is more suitable for young people?

Write about:

1. Subjects
2. Use of technology
3. (your own idea)

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

Student Response A

There is no doubt than some schools are stuck in the past. They aren't teaching in a way that is relevant to young people these days. Of course, others have moved with the times and are better.

This is a good opening paragraph. It is short but it makes it clear that the student has understood the question.

Some subjects are taught in a very old fashioned way. I am thinking particularly of maths. Nowadays, we all have not only calculators at our fingertips, but also computers. Some think that we don't need to learn maths in the way our parents did as we can make better use of our time. Of course, understanding basic maths is important but what about adapting the maths to make it more relevant?

The student uses a good structure here (not only... but also) to show an additional point.

For example, learning about how to manage personal finances and how to build spreadsheets for that.

The use of the rhetorical question here contributes to the communication of the essay well.

This brings me to my second point, that teaching us how to use technology is better. We can learn a lot using technology.

This paragraph is very short, and covers the second point in the notes but doesn't say much.

Lastly, I wonder if we even need school buildings. We can learn from our homes with the internet. Maybe we could even change the hours that we study to allow students to choose the time that suits them best.

The student has actually added two extra points of their own in this final paragraph. This is fine, but remember that you have to add one to complete the task.

Content

Although both of the content points are included and a third idea is added, the essay is uneven as the first point is covered much better than the other two. However, they are all addressed, so the student still scores full marks for this criterion.

5 / 5

Communicative achievement

The tone is appropriate for an essay. Ideas are expressed logically and clearly which helps the student to communicate with the reader. This helps to make the essay interesting to read. The fact that the last two points are very brief means the reader would most likely want to know more about these and so this doesn't quite reach full marks here. More information on these might have held the reader's attention more.

4 / 5

Organisation

The ideas in the essay are well organised, and it is easy to follow the content of the essay. Paragraph 3 is very short and this stands out. The student has used good phrases to link ideas and to introduce paragraphs (e.g. 'This brings me to my second point...'). This links ideas across paragraphs clearly.

4 / 5

Language

The language used is suitable for giving opinions and providing examples. The student shows a good range of grammatical structures and vocabulary. For example, relative clauses: '...in a way that is relevant...'; passive form: 'Some subjects are taught...'. The student has very good control of language and is usually very accurate.

4 / 5

Total marks: 17 / 20

This is a good answer the question. The content is uneven in that the first point is given more space in the answer than the other two, but the reader would still be fully informed. The student has used a lot of good language, and the writing is very accurate. The essay is well organised, and it is easy to follow the ideas. Changes in ideas are well signalled, and the tone is appropriate.

Student Response B

I think education is very important and it must think careful about make change. Is not possible to change everything. But education must be change to be good for the youngs.

For example, I don't like sience and I don't like study it. Maybe we can to choose the subjects we like to study. Is better that we enjoy.

I very much like to study technology though. I would like to have this subject at school. It can be include play games maybe! That skill help me to be handy.

My idea is that the horas of the school be change. It always start very early as as a teen we don't like to get up early. We are youngs and we like to sleep later. This can be a change for education.

Weighing up all the arguments, the subjects, the technology and the horas should be change.

There is a paragraph for each idea in the essay, even though they are all short.

Be careful to check your writing for words that are similar in your language. Here the student has used the word for 'hours' in their own language.

This is a good phrase to use to conclude an essay, but here the student could have used it to bring all of their ideas together better. For example, they could have summarised the points they made about the subjects and the technology rather than just listing the three things to change.

The essay is only just above the required length. This is acceptable, but the student could have added to the essay to expand on some of their ideas. It is a good idea to recognise how much of a page is taken up by 140–190 words in your writing as this will mean that you don't need to count words in the exam.

Content

The essay is relevant to the topic in the question, and the student has covered the two points in the notes and they have added their own idea. They have slightly misunderstood the second idea as the notes refer to how technology is used, but the student thinks it is about studying technology as a subject. The added idea is logical and is linked to the topic.

4 / 5

Communicative achievement

The tone of the essay is not always consistent. In Paragraph 3 the use of the exclamation mark stands out: 'It can be include play games maybe!' The use of a personal example is relevant and helps to engage the reader with the content (e.g. 'For example, I don't like sience...'). The ideas are quite simple and are only just enough for B2 Level.

3 / 5

Organisation

The paragraphing is clear and there is a function for each one. The essay overall is quite short so there is less opportunity to use linking devices. In general, the linking devices are quite simple and some sentences could have been linked better (e.g. 'I very much like to study technology though **so** I would like to have this subject at school').

3 / 5

Language

All of the content can be understood, and the student makes their ideas known. There are a lot of errors though, which sometimes means that the reader has to stop reading in order to check meaning. The grammar used is simple, but it often isn't totally accurate. The student doesn't show good control of language.

2 / 5

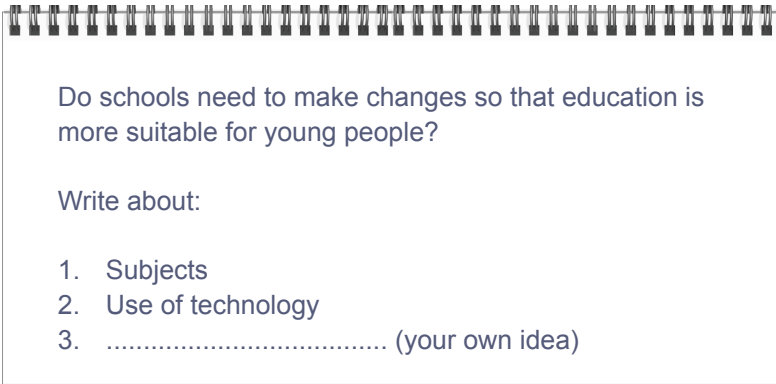
Total marks: 12 / 20

The student has answered the question, which is good. There is some organisation, but this could be better and the tone used in the essay is slightly inconsistent. The language is the biggest problem for the student here. They have ideas to write about, but they haven't been able to show control of language at this level. The vocabulary is rather basic too, and so this is the area that is the weakest for this student.

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

In your English class you have been talking about education. Now your English teacher has asked you to write an essay.

Write an essay using **all** your notes and giving reasons for your point of view.



Do schools need to make changes so that education is more suitable for young people?

Write about:

1. Subjects
2. Use of technology
3. (your own idea)

Highlight or underline the important words.

Outline plan:

Refer to the Planning Guide on page 12 for guidance on how to plan your response.

