

# Assessment of Writing

## Examiners and marking

Writing Examiners (WEs) undergo a rigorous process of training and certification before they are invited to mark. Once accepted, they are supervised by Team Leaders (TLs) who are in turn led by a Principal Examiner (PE), who guides and monitors the marking process.

WEs mark candidate responses in a secure online marking environment. The software randomly allocates candidate responses to ensure that individual examiners do not receive a concentration of good or weak responses, or of any one language group. The software also allows for examiners' marking to be monitored for quality and consistency. During the marking period, the PE and TLs are able to view their team's progress and to offer support and advice, as required.

## Assessment scales

Examiners mark tasks using assessment scales that were developed with explicit reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The scales, which are used across the spectrum of the Cambridge English General and Business English Writing tests, consist of four subscales: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation, and Language:

- **Content** focuses on how well the candidate has fulfilled the task, in other words if they have done what they were asked to do.
- **Communicative Achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the task and whether the candidate has used the appropriate register.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way the candidate puts together the piece of writing, in other words if it is logical and ordered.
- **Language** focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

Responses are marked on each subscale from 0 to 5.

When marking the tasks, examiners take into account length of responses and varieties of English:

- Guidelines on length are provided for each task; responses which are too short may not have an adequate range of language and may not provide all the information that is required, while responses which are too long may contain irrelevant content and have a negative effect on the reader. These may affect candidates' marks on the relevant subscales.
- Candidates are expected to use a particular variety of English with some degree of consistency in areas such as spelling, and not for example switch from using a British spelling of a word to an American spelling of the same word.

The subscale Content is common to all levels:

Content	
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.

The remaining three subscales (Communicative Achievement, Organisation, and Language) have descriptors specific to each CEFR level:

CEFR level	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
	Demonstrates complete command of the conventions of the communicative task. Communicates complex ideas in an effective and convincing way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.	Text is organised impressively and coherently using a wide range of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with complete flexibility.	Uses a wide range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, with fluency, precision, sophistication and style. Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and completely natural. Any inaccuracies occur only as slips.
C2	Uses the conventions of the communicative task with sufficient flexibility to communicate complex ideas in an effective way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.	Text is a well-organised, coherent whole, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with flexibility.	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, effectively and precisely. Uses a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication. Errors, if present, are related to less common words and structures, or occur as slips.
C1	Uses the conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas, as appropriate.	Text is well organised and coherent, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect.	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.
B2	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.
B1	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.
A2	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.

Cambridge English: Advanced Writing Examiners use the following assessment scale, extracted from the one on the previous page.

CI	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 with sufficient flexibility to communicate complex ideas in an effective way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.	Text is a well-organised, coherent whole, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with flexibility.	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, effectively and precisely. Uses a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication. Errors, if present, are related to less common words and structures, or occur as slips.
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 effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas, as appropriate.	Text is well organised and coherent, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect.	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.
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.	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.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>		

# Writing mark scheme

## Glossary of terms

### 1. GENERAL

<b>Generally</b>	<b>Generally</b> is a qualifier meaning not in every way or instance. Thus, 'generally appropriately' refers to performance that is not as good as 'appropriately'.
<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Flexible</b> and <b>flexibly</b> refer to the ability to adapt – whether language, organisational devices, or task conventions – rather than using the same form over and over, thus evidencing better control and a wider repertoire of the resource. Flexibility allows a candidate to better achieve communicative goals.

### 2. CONTENT

<b>Relevant</b>	<b>Relevant</b> means related or relatable to required content points and/or task requirements.
<b>Target reader</b>	The <b>target reader</b> is the hypothetical reader set up in the task, e.g. a magazine's readership, your English teacher.
<b>Informed</b>	The target reader is <b>informed</b> if content points and/or task requirements are addressed and appropriately developed. Some content points do not require much development (e.g. 'state what is x') while others require it ('describe', 'explain').

### 3. COMMUNICATIVE ACHIEVEMENT

<b>Conventions of the communicative task</b>	<b>Conventions of the communicative task</b> include such things as genre, format, register and function. For example, a personal letter should not be written as a formal report, should be laid out accordingly, and use the right tone for the communicative purpose.
<b>Holding the target reader's attention</b>	<b>Holding the target reader's attention</b> is used in the positive sense and refers to the quality of a text that allows a reader to derive meaning and not be distracted. It does not refer to texts that force a reader to read closely because they are difficult to follow or make sense of.
<b>Communicative purpose</b>	<b>Communicative purpose</b> refers to the communicative requirements as set out in the task, e.g. make a complaint, suggest alternatives.
<b>Straightforward and complex ideas</b>	<b>Straightforward ideas</b> are those which relate to relatively limited subject matter, usually concrete in nature, and which require simpler rhetorical devices to communicate.  <b>Complex ideas</b> are those which are of a more abstract nature, or which cover a wider subject area, requiring more rhetorical resources to bring together and express.

### 4. ORGANISATION

<b>Linking words, cohesive devices, and organisational patterns</b>	<b>Linking words</b> are cohesive devices, but are separated here to refer to higher-frequency vocabulary which provides explicit linkage. They can range from basic high-frequency items (such as 'and', 'but') to basic and phrasal items (such as 'because', 'first of all', 'finally').  <b>Cohesive devices</b> refers to more sophisticated linking words and phrases (e.g. 'moreover', 'it may appear', 'as a result'), as well as grammatical devices such as the use of reference pronouns, substitution (e.g. There are two women in the picture. The one on the right ...), ellipsis (e.g. The first car he owned was a convertible, the second a family car), or repetition.  <b>Organisational patterns</b> refers to less-explicit ways of achieving connection at the between-sentence level and beyond, e.g. arranging sentences in climactic order, the use of parallelism, using a rhetorical question to set up a new paragraph.
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### 5. LANGUAGE

<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Basic vocabulary</b> refers to vocabulary used for survival purposes, for simple transactions, and the like.  <b>Everyday vocabulary</b> refers to vocabulary that comes up in common situations of a non-technical nature in the relevant domain.  <b>Less common lexis</b> refers to vocabulary items that appear less often in the relevant domain. These items often help to express ideas more succinctly and precisely.
<b>Appropriacy of vocabulary</b>	<b>Appropriacy of vocabulary</b> means the use of words and phrases that fit the context of the given task. For example, in <i>I'm very sensible to noise</i> , the word <i>sensible</i> is inappropriate as the word should be <i>sensitive</i> . Another example would be <i>Today's big snow makes getting around the city difficult</i> . The phrase <i>getting around</i> is well suited to this situation. However, <i>big snow</i> is inappropriate as <i>big</i> and <i>snow</i> are not used together. <i>Heavy snow</i> would be appropriate.
<b>Grammatical forms</b>	<b>Simple grammatical forms</b> are words, phrases, basic tenses and simple clauses.  <b>Complex grammatical forms</b> are longer and more complex items, e.g. noun clauses, relative and adverb clauses, subordination, passive forms, infinitives, verb patterns, modal forms and tense contrasts.
<b>Grammatical control</b>	<b>Grammatical control</b> refers to the ability to consistently use grammar accurately and appropriately to convey intended meaning.
<b>Range</b>	<b>Range</b> refers to the variety of words and grammatical forms a candidate uses. At higher levels, candidates will make increasing use of a greater variety of words, fixed phrases, collocations and grammatical forms.
<b>Errors and slips</b>	<b>Errors</b> are systematic mistakes. <b>Slips</b> are mistakes that are non-systematic, i.e. the candidate has learned the vocabulary item or grammatical structure, but just happened to make a mistake in this instance. In a candidate's response, where most other examples of a lexical/grammatical point are accurate, a mistake on that point would most likely be a slip.
<b>Impede communication</b>	<b>Impede communication</b> means getting in the way of meaning. <b>Meaning can still be determined</b> indicates that some effort is required from the reader to determine meaning.