Assessing writing for Cambridge English Qualifications: A guide for teachers

Cambridge English Qualifications

B2 First for Schools

Contents

Who this guide is for

Teachers around the world spend many hours evaluating learners' writing. This guide is for you. With lots of practical tips and real examples, it will help you to develop and assess learners' writing skills in preparation for the B2 First for Schools exam.

About B2 First for Schools

✔ Tests reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, plus use of English

✔ Shows that learners have the language skills they need to communicate in an English-speaking environment, including:
  · expressing opinions and presenting arguments
  · writing clear, detailed English, and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of different points of view
  · following the news
  · writing articles, emails, essays, reviews or stories

✔ Comes after B1 Preliminary for Schools and before C1 Advanced

✔ Targeted at the same CEFR level as B2 First but with content aimed at school-age learners rather than adults

✔ Can be taken digitally or on paper

How to use this guide

To get the most from this guide:

· Try the practical ideas and reflect on how these techniques affect the processes of learning and teaching in your classroom.

· Discuss different approaches with learners in order to understand their preferences and needs, and to find out what approaches are most helpful to them.

· At the end of the guide, there are several real samples of assessed writing from the B2 First for Schools exam. A top tip before you look at the real marks and comments: try applying the official assessment criteria to the written samples by yourself! Make a note of whether you gave similar marks or made similar comments.

· You can navigate the document by using the hyperlinks in the text and the buttons on each spread:

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Key terminology

Language assessment is a specialist field and there is some common terminology which might be unfamiliar to you. Learning to recognise these terms will help you to understand this guide.
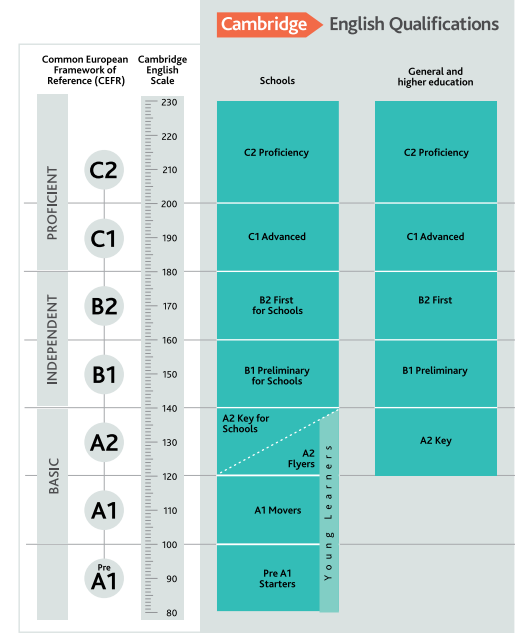
Definition	Cambridge English says ...	Teachers might say ...
A person who is learning English, usually in a classroom.	learner	
A person who takes an exam. (This is a more formal word because it refers to work done in the exam, not work done in the classroom.)	candidate	student / learner / pupil
The things considered when a piece of writing is marked for an exam. For the B2 First for Schools exam, these are: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.	1. Writing Assessment Scale 2. Writing Assessment subscales	1. Assessment criteria 2. Assessment categories
Each piece of writing gets four sets of marks for each of the subscales, from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest).	Bands (0–5)	marks / scores / grades

These terms are commonly used to refer to our exams. There are also some other terms in this guide which are more widely used in the field of assessment. When these terms appear in this guide, you'll find an explanation nearby in a glossary box like this:

Key terminology

The **Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)** is an international standard for describing language ability. It uses a six-point scale, from **A1** for beginners up to **C2** for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing, such as teachers or learners, to see the level of different qualifications.

CEFR scale

Understanding the Cambridge English Writing Assessment Scale

Every Cambridge English Qualification targets a specific level of the CEFR and includes a range of tasks that are suitable for learners at this level.

The detailed **descriptors** in the Writing Assessment subscales are slightly different for each exam and are based on its target CEFR level. However, all Cambridge English Qualifications are designed to test a learner's ability to understand and use English effectively in real-life contexts, so the descriptors for different exams have some things in common.

For example, candidates at every level are expected to demonstrate good organisation in their written work, but progression and different levels of ability are expected in each exam:

Organisation		
A2 Key for Schools	**B1 Preliminary for Schools**	**B2 First for Schools**
The text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words.	The text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	The text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices.

(Descriptor)

📖 Key terminology

Descriptors are detailed notes to help examiners and teachers use the assessment subscales effectively to evaluate and grade a learner's writing. Descriptors for Bands 1, 3 and 5 indicate what a candidate is expected to demonstrate at lower, average and higher levels of ability.

These points are considered by Cambridge English when marking a piece of work:

Content	✔ The candidate answered the task. They have done what they were asked to do.
	✔ The candidate did not include everything they were asked to. They have written something irrelevant.
Communicative Achievement	✔ The writing is appropriate for the task. The candidate used a style which is appropriate for the specific communicative context.
	✔ They have written in a way that is not suitable – for example, using a very formal style in an email to a friend or ending an article with 'Love'.
Organisation	✔ The writing is put together well. It is logical and ordered.
	✔ It is difficult for the reader to follow. It uses elements of organisation which are not appropriate for the genre, like beginning an email with a title or starting every sentence in an article on a new line instead of using paragraphs.
Language	✔ There is a good range of vocabulary and grammar. They are used accurately.
	✔ There are mistakes that could make the text difficult or confusing for the reader. Some mistakes are unproblematic. Whether the reader is still able to understand the text is considered.

A learner might be stronger in one area than another – for example, they might be good at fully answering the question (Content) but not very accurate in their use of grammar and vocabulary (Language). For this reason, each piece of writing is given a separate mark for each subscale, from 0 to 5. Together, these indicate the learner's areas of strength and weakness in the four different areas of assessment.

For example, if a candidate scores Band 5 for Content and Band 2 for Language, this suggests that they answered the question well and the reader would not feel that any information was missing, but that the use of grammar or vocabulary was not very accurate.

If a candidate scores Band 3 or above in the B2 First for Schools exam, this generally indicates an ability of at least CEFR B2 level. Bands 1 and 2 indicate that the learner is still performing at B1 level.

Subscales

	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
0				

Bands　　　　　　　　　　**Descriptors**

Learners' writing is assessed using these assessment scales, bands and descriptors. The quality and consistency of the marking is closely monitored, which means that that learners around the world can feel confident that their exam results reflect their true ability to write in English.

How to assess and develop learners' writing skills in the classroom

It takes time and practice to develop good writing skills, and part of this development is regular formative assessment. Teachers can do this assessment, but learners can also assess their performance for themselves.

To prepare for the B2 First for Schools exam, learners should:

- have plenty of practice, in class and at home, of reading and writing the kinds of texts they will see in the exam: emails, articles, stories, reviews and essays
- have chances to practise exam tasks with clear time limits and word limits, just like in the real exam
- make sure they can write clearly so that their answers can be read easily.

They must also understand:

- what they're being assessed on in the exam
- their own strengths and weaknesses
- how they can improve any areas of weakness.

The key to this understanding is regular, effective assessment.

It's a good idea to use a mix of teacher assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment during an exam preparation course. This variety can make lessons more interesting and engaging, but it's also useful for learners to write for different audiences and to get feedback from different sources, as we all have different strengths and notice different things.

📖 Key terminology

Formative assessment is when a teacher gives learners feedback on their progress during a course, rather than at the end of it, so that the learners can learn from the feedback.

Teacher assessment

⭐ Top tips

- Assessment isn't just about correcting mistakes, and three of the four Writing Assessment subscales in B2 First for Schools are not about language accuracy. So it's important to respond to what learners write, not just how they wrote it.

- There are several different types of writing task in Part 2 of the B2 First for Schools Writing paper, and learners will usually show a preference or strength for some of them but not all of them. It's useful for learners to be self-aware in this respect and avoid a particular task type if it is unsuited to their interests or experience. **Activity 1** will help you and your learners identify which task types they could focus on.

- Formative assessment is about learning from feedback and not just about correcting mistakes. Encourage learners to use more sophisticated and complex language, as this is part of learning and communicating effectively. Credit is given when learners attempt to use more complex language, even if they make mistakes. **Activity 2** is one way that you could give feedback on such efforts.

- Hearing the teacher's voice can feel more personal and supportive than receiving written feedback in red pen. For example, you could make a short video or voice recording with your comments.

- Adopting different approaches to giving feedback is particularly helpful to support learners with specific learning needs, such as dyslexia.learning needs, such as dyslexia.

Activity 1

Assessment focus: Choosing which Part 2 task types to answer.

Aims: To raise learners' awareness of their own strengths and preferences; to help them prioritise which task types to focus on improving.

Steps:

1. Over a period of weeks, set learners one sample task of each type from Part 2 of the B2 First for Schools Writing paper: an article, an email, a review and a story.

2. After each writing assignment, ask learners to complete the self-evaluation template below. They should circle a number for each item on the left and circle a phrase for the final statement at the bottom which reflects their overall opinion. A **self-evaluation template** for you to print is attached.

I found this writing task …						Other thoughts/reflections:
	Not at all			**Very**		
Easy	1	2	3	4	5	
Useful	1	2	3	4	5	
Interesting	1	2	3	4	5	
Would you like to try this task type again?						
	Definitely not!		Maybe/I'm not sure		Definitely!	

3. Collect each student's self-evaluations into a folder (offline or digital) so that you can come back to them later, in step 4.

4. After learners have had the opportunity to practise each of the task types from Part 2 of the exam, dedicate some time for them to look back at each piece of writing and their self-evaluations. They should now decide:

   · Do they still agree with their original evaluations and comments? (If not, why not? Perhaps they were just tired that day, or misunderstood the task so didn't produce their best written work, etc.)

   · Which two to three task types do they enjoy most? Which did they feel most able to answer based on their own interests and experience?

   You can do this final step in class, as homework or in tutorial time – just make sure you have a record of which task types they chose as their favourites. You will need to spend some time checking their self-evaluations, now and later in the course, to see if you agree with the learners' judgements.

   It's important that you and the learners themselves share a sense of where their strengths and preferences lie, so they can focus on their personal priorities before the exam. If you strongly disagree with a learner's self-evaluations, discuss this with them.

Adaptation – Activity 1

This is a useful activity for the beginning of a new course with learners who are moving up a level. Ask learners to bring to class a selection of different task types and their own written responses. Ask them to evaluate their work using the **self-evaluation template**. They should finish the evaluation process with an idea of which task types are best suited to their own interests and experiences.

This will give them a good sense of focus for the rest of the course, and a good starting point of self-awareness and learning autonomy.

📄 Activity 2

Assessment focus: Language range and sophistication.

Aims: To encourage learners to stretch themselves; to praise learners for trying to use new language to communicate more effectively; to demonstrate to learners that not all mistakes are 'bad' (they are evidence of learning!).

Steps:

1. Give learners a sample exam task to write for homework. Tell them that when you mark their work, you will look for examples of how they use a wide range of language and their attempts to use more complex language.

2. When you collect their writing, read each one first without a pen in your hand – this will stop you being tempted to write on it or make corrections! Think about:
   - the creativity of their ideas
   - how they communicated these ideas
   - any evidence of trying to use more complex or sophisticated vocabulary or grammar.

3. Now work through these points in reverse order: first, circle examples of their efforts to use more complex or sophisticated language. Then add a personal comment at the bottom about their ideas and how they expressed them. Focus on the positives.

4. Keep a note of some of the more complex or sophisticated language the learners tried to use, even if they made mistakes. Bring these notes to the next lesson and praise the class on their efforts. Share your 'top 5' examples of good efforts with the class so they can learn from these. Keep your selections anonymous so that the class don't feel that you have favourite learners!

Peer assessment

⭐ Top tips

- Remind learners to think of their reader, and who they are writing for. In the exam they are often asked to write to a friend, a teacher or a classmate. This is mentioned in the assessment subscale for Communicative Achievement. Encourage learners to practise writing for their reader. In the classroom, their reader might be the teacher or a classmate.

- Some learners can feel nervous and uncomfortable about getting feedback from peers instead of a teacher. This is especially common among teens and in accuracy-focused or exam-focused contexts. Talk to learners about the benefits of peer assessment so they understand that it will help them develop their writing skills and that they will have other opportunities to get feedback from the teacher.

- Peer feedback is most effective when it's included as a regular part of a course. You could also consider including teacher feedback as a final step, after learners have had a chance to revise their writing based on peer feedback.

- Learners might not know how to begin giving feedback, so before they start, give them a clear list of things to look for or a model of how you mark a piece of writing.

- Encourage learners to start with the 'big picture' before focusing on specific things to change or correct. Learners often notice mistakes immediately and forget that the general purpose of writing is to communicate! Invite them to think about content and organisation first, and to offer praise before criticism.

📖 Key terminology

Peer assessment is when learners give feedback on each other's language, work, learning strategies, or performance. Research shows that people who are similar to the learner in age, gender, first language and learning goals are very motivating as role models.

Activity 3

Assessment focus: The importance of planning for organisation.

Aims: To demonstrate how a good plan can help learners with the Organisation subscale; to improve learners' ability to plan and evaluate their own work.

Steps:

1. Show learners the sample **Part 1** essay task from **page 33** of this guide and ask them to brainstorm some ideas for how they could respond to the question.

2. Now show them **Sample answer 2**. They should compare their ideas and see if this candidate mentioned any of the same things.

3. In pairs, learners decide what band they would give this sample answer for Organisation and why.

4. Now give learners the examiner's band and commentary for the Organisation subscale. Do they agree with the comments? Why/why not?

5. In the same pairs, they should decide how they would improve the organisation of this candidate's essay. They should keep the main ideas but improve the structure and use cohesive devices to connect the ideas better.

6. For homework, learners refer to the sample answer and re-write it, improving the organisation.

7. In the next class, put learners into new pairs. They should read each other's improved essays and give feedback. As they read, ask them to think about:
   - the changes their partner has made to the organisation of the essay
   - the changes their partner has made to the language in the essay
   - what effects these changes have.

Activity 4

Assessment focus: Content – generating ideas for Part 1 based on a prompt.

Aims: To connect learners' real-life interests and ideas to their written work; to provide practice in giving opinions on a wide variety of topics, which is very important for Part 1 of the B2 First for Schools Writing paper.

Steps:

1. Listen to the topics that learners chat about as they arrive in class, such as TV shows, YouTube clips, games, news items, etc. Keep a note of these.m.

2. After a couple of weeks, start the class one day by sharing your list with the learners. Spend some time discussing these things to find out more about why they find them so interesting. Are they still talking about them?

3. Now invite learners to choose one of these topics. (If the class are divided, with a significant number of learners interested in one topic and a significant number interested in another, you could split the class into two groups.)

4. Together, create a sample Part 1 exam question about this topic. A **template** for you to print is attached.

5. Now put learners into pairs to brainstorm, select and add ideas. Early finishers should continue to plan the structure of their essay, organising their ideas into paragraph topics.

6. Learners now work in the same pairs to write their essay collaboratively. Don't worry about timing this like a real exam – the purpose of this activity is to generate ideas and encourage learners to really enjoy the process of writing an opinion essay.

7. After they've finished writing, or in the next lesson, pairs swap their essays and give each other feedback. Remember to encourage learners to start with the 'big picture' before focusing on specific things to change or correct.

Self-assessment

★ Top tips

- Include self-assessment as a regular part of your course. For example, circle mistakes in learners' writing and ask them to find the corrections themselves. Talk to learners about why it's helpful to take personal responsibility for their own learning.

- Get learners to count the number of words in their writing when they do exam practice. If doing the paper-based test, they need to know what 140 to 190 words typically looks like in their own handwriting and that counting words wastes valuable time during the real exam. In the digital exam, the words typed on the screen are counted automatically.

- For learners who find writing very difficult, let them try tasks first in their native language, then talk to them about how this felt. Did they still find it difficult? This will help them understand their own strengths and weaknesses – perhaps they need to improve their English, or perhaps they are not confident writers in general.

📖 Key terminology

Self-assessment is when learners decide for themselves if they think their progress or language use is good or not. Developing good self-awareness is important for becoming an effective independent learner.

📄 Activity 5

Assessment focus: All subscales, but particularly language range.

Aims: To demonstrate the benefits of using online resources for self-study; to provide variety (offline/digital) in how learners practise and evaluate their own writing; to offer a wider range of practice tasks to learners who need, or who are very keen, to develop.

1. Show learners the **Write & Improve**[1] website. Focus on the B2 First section in the left-hand menu[2], which includes an extensive range of Part 1 essay tasks:
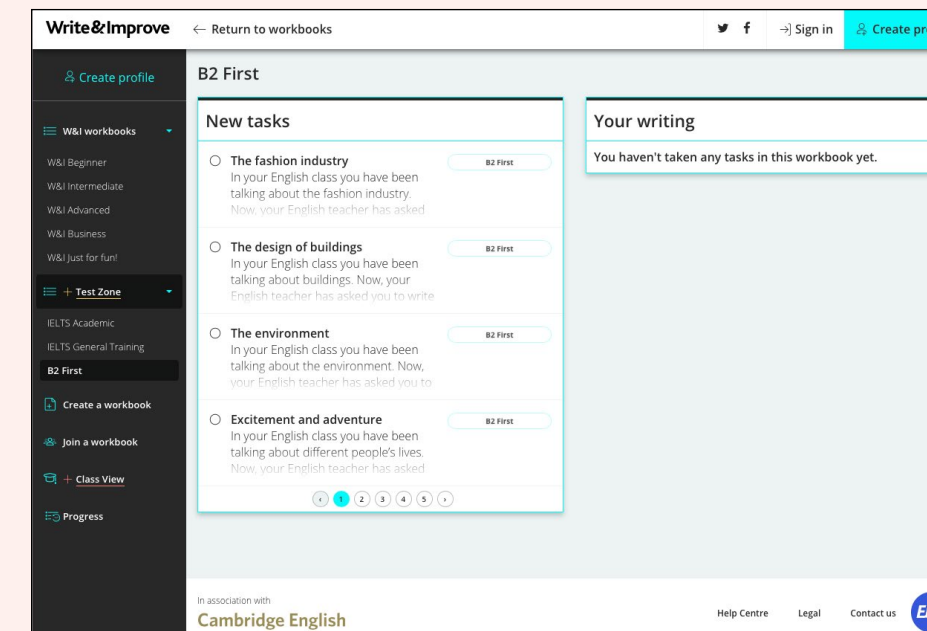
[1] Write & Improve is a free online tool which has many exam-style tasks at different levels.

[2] Note that to answer tasks in this section of the website, learners will need to create a free account. Alternatively, they can do the more general tasks under the 'W&I Advanced' section of the left-hand menu, which does not require them to sign in.

2. If necessary, demonstrate how the tool works: learners select a task, type and submit their answers, then receive immediate feedback, including tips about how to improve.

3. Get learners individually to choose an essay title which interests them. This will be more motivating than if they were given an essay title which they must answer, even if they struggle to think of ideas for their response! You can do this in class if you want to enforce a time limit, or alternatively, set it for homework.

4. After writing their first draft and receiving feedback from the website, learners must now re-write their text. For self-assessment, this is perhaps the most important step, because it forces them to reflect on their choices and make changes to their own writing.

5. **Follow-up:** In class, learners show a peer their first draft and the improved version. They should spend 5 to 10 minutes discussing in pairs what they learned from this activity, which will help them when writing in future. This timed discussion forces them to be selective and makes their selections more memorable, increasing the chances that they will truly improve their writing in future.

Activity 6

Assessment focus: All B2 First for Schools assessment subscales..

Aims: To improve learners' ability to evaluate and revise their own writing.

Steps:

1. At the start of a period of study (a semester, term, new month, etc.), give students a sample exam task. Don't help them prepare – just give them the task and ask them to write a response.

2. Collect these responses and keep them until step 4. Don't mark them yet – but you might want to take some private notes on common errors which you can refer back to later. Let the learners know not to expect feedback quickly, but that there is a good reason!

3. Now spend a few weeks working on points that learners need to address for this task type. For example, for story-writing you would cover:

   · Content: ideas generation, addressing the points in the exam question, etc.

   · Communicative Achievement: developing a clear storyline, typical features of story-writing, etc.

   · Organisation: paragraphing, linking words, etc.

   · Language: narrative tenses, expressive adjectives, metaphors, etc.

4. After several weeks, bring back what the learners wrote in step 1 and get them to evaluate their own writing according to the task criteria. Ask them to think about what they have studied in the past few weeks. Is there anything they would now like to change in their texts?

5. Use class time to get them to re-write their responses now within a time limit.

6. **Optional extension:** If you'd like to include teacher assessment as well as self-assessment in this activity, both versions of the text could be submitted for teacher assessment. You can give the learners feedback on how well they improved their writing the second time around. Try to give specific examples, referring to both their original and revised work.

How to assess writing for B2 First for Schools

The texts and tasks in Cambridge English Qualifications are designed to reflect real-world communication and to test learners' true abilities in English, so preparing learners for the Writing test shouldn't be very different from developing and assessing their writing skills in general. But of course, the tasks, timings and assessment scales for an exam are very specific and learners should have plenty of practice before they take the real exam.

The B2 First for Schools Writing paper has two parts and lasts for 1 hour and 20 minutes in total. Candidates have to show that they can write different types of text in English.

	Part 1: Writing an essay	Part 2: Writing an article, email, review or a story
How many tasks are there?	One. The candidate must answer this task.	Three. The candidate must choose one task to answer.
How many marks are there?	20 (maximum)	20 (maximum)
What do candidates have to do?	Write an essay of 140–190 words. They must give their opinion about the essay title, use the two ideas given and add an idea of their own. They should give reasons for their opinion.	Write 140–190 words. Depending on the question, students will have to advise, compare, describe, evaluate, explain, express opinions, justify and/or recommend something.

Writing Assessment subscales for B2 First for Schools

As with other Cambridge English exams, candidates' writing for B2 First for Schools is assessed in terms of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. The detailed band descriptors are as follows:

B2	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 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.
4		_Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5._		
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole 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.
2		_Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3._		
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally 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.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	_Performance below Band 1._		

These subscales and descriptors were designed to be used when marking Cambridge writing exams, so some of the specialist terminology may be unfamiliar to you. Below, you can see what these descriptors mean in practice. For each subscale, there's an explanation of the descriptors, followed by a real example of an exam task, a candidate's response and the comments given.

At the end of this section, you can find five sample responses written by real candidates in the B2 First for Schools exam, along with full comments and band scores.

Content

Band	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.

What does this mean?

The writer included everything that the task required them to include.

Who would read this text? (For example: the readers of a magazine, or the writer's English teacher.)

Would the reader have all the information they need? The task always tells the candidate what information to include. Some of these content requirements do not need much development (for example, *say what* …) and some parts require more development (for example, *describe* … or *explain* …).

The writer included something that wasn't necessary or related to the task.

The writer clearly didn't understand something in the task. (For example: a Part 1 task asked the candidate to talk about *learning* languages, but instead they wrote more generally about creative uses of language.)
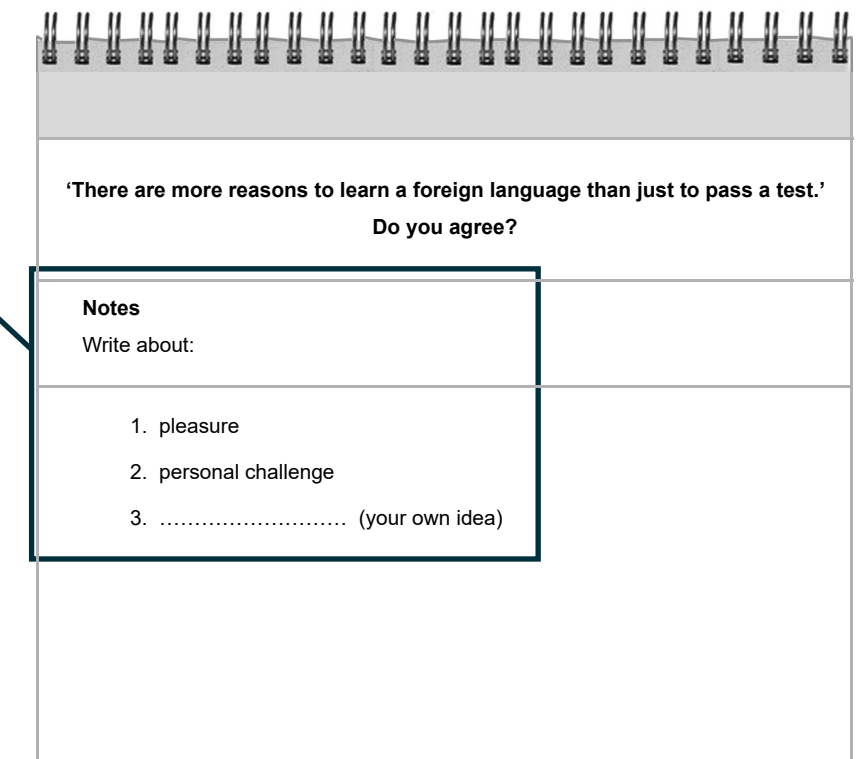
👁 Did you notice?

Look again at the descriptors for each band. You can see that they include similar sentences but with slightly different words, such as minor irrelevances, irrelevances, totally irrelevant. This should help you to compare the bands more easily when you're looking at a piece of writing and trying to decide which mark to give it. For example:

The task requires the candidate to use **all the notes** in their answer.

Writing Part 1

You **must** answer this question. Write your question in **140–190** words in an appropriate style **on the separate answer sheet**

1. In your English class you have been talking about learning languages. Now your English teacher has asked you to write an essay for homework.

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

'There are more reasons to learn a foreign language than just to pass a test.'
Do you agree?

Notes
Write about:

1. pleasure
2. personal challenge
3. ……………………… (your own idea)

Look at **Sample answer 2** on **page 36**.

There is some **minor irrelevance** in this answer, since the candidate focuses more on their personal experience and motivation, **not directly addressing the points in the notes** about learning for pleasure and personal challenge.

This is a good example of minor irrelevance **without the task being misinterpreted** – and this is why the candidate scored 3, not 2, for Content.

Communicative Achievement

Band	Communicative Achievement	What does this mean?
5	Uses the **conventions of the communicative task** effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and **complex ideas**, as appropriate.	These include genre, format, register and function. For example, a personal letter should not look like a formal report, and an email to a teacher would probably be more formal and polite than an email to a close friend! **Complex** ideas are abstract rather than **straightforward** ideas, or cover a wider subject area, which means the candidate must have more linguistic resources to bring together and express these ideas.
3	Uses the conventions of the communicative task to **hold the target reader's attention** and communicate straightforward ideas.	This is a good thing! It means the reader is interested, not distracted, and it's not difficult for the reader to understand the text.
1	Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate **straightforward** ideas.	**Straightforward** ideas are usually concrete, limited in subject and are communicated with relatively simple style, words and grammar.

✔ A real example: Part 1 essay

"There are more reasons to learn a foreign language than to pass a test"

Everything around us revolves around language(s), it is the most important thing in our lives. Society would just not function without it. ~~They are~~ It is our future and I would personaly love to learn as many as I possibly can.

Not everything in life is done because it is necessary. Learning a new language can be a lot of fun. Many people only do it as a hoby, or their knowledge is something that brings them pride and pleasure.

Secondly, we have people who do it simply to challenge themselves. Truly I believe that having a great outcome that stems from your hard work and dedication to learn something new is a wonderful way to ~~challenge~~ prove your ability to yourself and others. Then there is travelling. It is very important to be able to understand and have a conversation with someone abroad, unless you would like to get lost or worse.

To conclude, I think that learning a new language is an amazing thing no matter why you do it. It is always better to do things out of enjoyment, but even if you do it for a test, that knowledge will always be useful.

Comments on Communicative Achievement:

The conventions of the essay genre have been used effectively to hold the target reader's attention. Straightforward and complex ideas have been communicated: *Everything around us*; *Not everything in life is done because it is necessary*; *unless you would like to get lost or worse*; *I think that learning a new language is an amazing thing no matter why you do it.*

Band: 5

Organisation

Band	Organisation
5	Text is well organised and **coherent**, using a variety of cohesive devices and **organisational patterns** to generally good effect.
3	Text is generally well organised and coherent, using **a variety of linking words** and cohesive devices.
1	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of **cohesive devices**.

What does this mean?

Easy to understand because the ideas and sentences are well connected.

Organisational patterns are ways of connecting sentences which help the reader understand the writer's intended meaning and flow of ideas. This includes things like starting a new paragraph with a direct question to the reader, arranging sentences in an order which leads from simpler to more exciting ideas, etc.

Linking words show an explicit connection between ideas and sentences, such as *for example*, because, *finally* and so on.

Linking words are just one type of **cohesive device**. Other cohesive devices include words and phrases that connect ideas and words within a text, such as pronouns (*she*, *theirs*, etc.), substitution (*the last one*, *this*, etc.), relative clauses (... *which is why* ...) and so on.

✔ A real example: Part 2 email

3. You have just received an email from your English-speaking friend, Jo.

> From: Jo
> Hi,
> You know I've joined my local swimming team – well, I love it! We train every Tuesday and Thursday after school. Now my parents want me to go to an extra maths class on Tuesdays, so I won't be able to swim then. How do you think I can persuade them to change their minds?
> Write soon,
> Jo

Write your **email**.

Hi Jo,

It is good to receive news from you! I bet you are swimming like a fish. Do you remember when we were kids and we made a few races in Angelina's pool?

I understand why you are trying to persuade them but remember that they want your best. If I were you firstly I would try to talk with your swimming coach and ask him about the possibilities of training another day. Then if the answer would have been negative I will probably try to do the same with yours future math teacher. I am sure that everyone knows the importance of practising sports while studying. So they will find a solution.

If everything goes don't doesn't happen as you and I expect ensure that your parents don't get mad with your decision. They are giving their best! Put your education in front first place. Opportunities to swim you will have a lot during your life. Moreover, you can come to Barcelone and try to catch me in the pool.

Good luck,

Sam

Comments on Organisation:

The text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices: *talk with your swimming coach and ask him*; *Then*; *the answer*; *do the same*; *So*; *Moreover*.

Band: 3

Language

Band	Language
5	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.
3	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**.
1	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.

What does this mean?

Less common lexis is vocabulary which is not used very often in this context, perhaps because it expresses quite specific ideas or concepts.

Flexibility means the writer can adapt their choice of words and style, rather than using the same form over and over. This allows a writer to communicate more effectively and efficiently.

Vocabulary is **appropriate** when it fits the context of the task and the other words around it. For example, if a candidate writes *Big snow makes getting around the city difficult* in an article, the expression *getting around the city* suits the style of an article but *big snow* is not appropriate, because the usual expression is *heavy snow*.

This means the writer seems to be in control of their grammar – they are not making lucky guesses! They can consistently use grammar that is accurate and suits the context.

Big snow is a good example of an error which does not impede communication. The reader can probably understand what the writer means, but they might be distracted for a moment while they think about it.

Sometimes, candidates repeat the same word or phrase a lot because they don't seem to know other vocabulary which they could use to express their ideas.

✔ A real example: Part 2 story

4. You have seen this announcement in an English-language magazine for teenagers.

> ### Stories wanted
> We are looking for stories for our new English-language magazine for teenagers. Your story must begin with this sentence:
> When Susie's family arrived at the hotel, they were surprised to see hundreds of photographers waiting outside.
> Your story must include:
> • a famous person
> • a request

Write your **story**.

When Susie's family arrived at the hotel, they were surprised to see hundreds of photographers waiting outside. They had no idea what was going on. Everyone acted like crazy. It wasn't a famous hotel. The only thing less famous than the hotel itself are the clients of this hotel. So why would any photographer and or journalist be interested in this place?

Because they already had a reservation, they entered the hotel. Everything seemed normal, until they went on a dinner. They hadn't had a proper meal the whole day, so a restaurant in the hotel was what they were had been looking forward to.

After they recieved their meal, their happiness disappeared. It was disgusting, the steaks they ordered were dry like a shoe. Before they managed to chew those steaks, the a celebrity showed up. It was Gordon Ramsay, a famous chef. He was had been shooting his series "Hotel Hell" here. He asked everyone to leave. Unusual request, but not from him. That was it, he closed the kitchen. Everyone knew what that meant ... and regreted every bite.

Comments on Organisation:

A range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, is used appropriately: *the clients*; *had a reservation*; *a proper meal*; *looking forward to*; *disgusting; to chew*; *a celebrity*; *showed up*; *a famous chef*; *shooting his series*; *regreted every bite*.

A range of simple and complex grammatical forms is used with control and flexibility: *They had no idea* ... ; *The only thing less famous than the hotel itself*; *why would ... be interested*; *was what they had been looking forward to*; *He had been shooting his series*.

There are a few errors, which do not impede communication.

Band: 5

Try it yourself!

Now, you'll find five sample answers from real B2 First for Schools candidates, including the ones we looked at above. These include the band scores and full comments given. Together, these will help you understand what to expect from learners with stronger, weaker and average abilities.

But first, why not try marking these samples yourself using the Writing Assessment Scales? It's a good idea to practise, because using these scales when marking your own learners' writing will help you to:

· analyse their strengths and weaknesses when they practise writing

· form an impression of how ready they are to take the Writing part of the B2 First for Schools exam.

You'll find a **blank, photocopiable teacher assessment template** at the end of this guide which you can print and use for assessing any of the samples below. You should also refer to the detailed B2 First for Schools band descriptors on **page 23**.

Sample tasks with comments

Part 1

Task: Part 1 – essay

Writing Part 1

You **must** answer this question. Write your question in **140–190** words in an appropriate style **on the separate answer sheet**

---

1. In your English class you have been talking about learning languages. Now your English teacher has asked you to write an essay for homework.

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

'There are more reasons to learn a foreign language than just to pass a test.'

Do you agree?

Notes

Write about:

1. pleasure

2. personal challenge

3. ……………………… (your own idea)

✎ Task: Part 1 – essay

Sample answer 1

"There are more reasons to learn a foreign language than to pass a test"

Everything around us revolves around language(s), it is the most important thing in our lives. Society would just not function without it. ~~They are~~ It is our future and I would personaly love to learn as many as I possibly can.

Not everything in life is done because it is necessary. Learning a new language can be a lot of fun. Many people only do it as a hoby, or their knowledge is something that brings them pride and pleasure.

Secondly, we have people who do it simply to challenge themselves. Truly I believe that having a great outcome that stems from your hard work and dedication to learn something new is a wonderful way to ~~challenge~~ prove your ability to yourself and others. Then there is travelling. It is very important to be able to understand and have a conversation with someone abroad, unless you would like to get lost or worse.

To conclude, I think that learning a new language is an amazing thing no matter why you do it. It is always better to do things out of enjoyment, but even if you do it for a test, that knowledge will always be useful.

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All of the content is relevant to the task. The candidate has discussed pleasure, personal challenge and travel as different motivations for learning a language, so the target reader is fully informed.
Communicative Achievement	5	The conventions of the essay genre have been used effectively to hold the target reader's attention. Straightforward and complex ideas have been communicated: *Everything around us*; *Not everything in life is done because it is necessary*; *unless you would like to get lost or worse*; *I think that learning a new language is an amazing thing no matter why you do it*.
Organisation	4	The text is well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices: *without it. It is*; *as many as I possibly can*; *only do it*; *people who do it*; *Then there is travelling*; *To conclude*; *that knowledge*.
Language	4	A range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, is used appropriately: *revolves around*; *function*; *a great outcome*; *stems from*; *no matter why*. A range of simple and some complex grammatical forms has been used with control and some flexibility: *It is our future ... possibly can*; *Many people ... pleasure*; *Truly ... others*; *It is very important ... worse*; *It is always ... be useful*. The errors do not impede communication: *... personaly*; *hoby*.

Task: Part 1 – essay

Sample answer 2

Learning a a foreign languages is very important nowadays. English, in particular, is essential because it allows is spoken all over the world. That's the reason why we start studying it from the age of six years old. Going abroad and being able to speak to native people is very satisfying and that's why I want to improve my knowledge about foreign languages.

I decided to take this exam to know how high my level of English is, but also because I need this certification to go abroad next summer. I really want to come back to Cornwall, an amazing region in the South-West of England. I've been there twice with my family, but now I want to go alone. Only being there to England I can really improve my English comprehension and speaking skills.

Fortunately

Fortunately I can will have some English lessons which taught in English at university and I can't wait for it because it will be an interesting challenge for me.

Studying foreign languages is essential to live and to travel. It isn't simple and I surely have to challenge myself everyday, but the result is so satisfying that we I can't do without it.

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	3	There is some minor irrelevance here, since the focus of the discussion seems to be the candidate's personal experience and motivation, and the points about learning for pleasure and personal challenge are only incidentally addressed. The target reader is on the whole informed.
Communicative Achievement	4	The conventions of the essay genre have been used to hold the target reader's attention. Straightforward and some complex ideas have been communicated: *English, in particular, is essential*; *Going abroad and being able to speak to native people is very satisfying*; *an interesting challenge for me*; *Studying … do without it*.
Organisation	3	The text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices: *That's the reason why*; *that's why*; *but also because*; *I've been there*; *I can't wait for it*; *without it*.
Language	4	A range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, has been used appropriately: *an amazing region*; *comprehension and speaking skills*; *Fortunately*; *the result is so satisfying*. A range of simple and complex grammatical forms has been used with a good degree of control: *That's the reason … six years old*; *I decided … next summer*; *I've been there … go alone*; *Fortunately … for me*. The errors do not impede communication: *knowledge about*; *come back*; *Only being to England I can*; *everyday*.

Task: Part 2 – story

2. You have seen this announcement in an English-language magazine for teenagers.

Stories wanted

We are looking for stories for our new English-language magazine for teenagers. Your story must **begin** with this sentence:

When Susie's family arrived at the hotel, they were surprised to see hundreds of photographers waiting outside.

Your story must include:

- a famous person
- a request

Write your **story**.

Sample answer 3

When Susie's family arrived at the hotel, they were surprised to see hundreds of photographers waiting outside. They had no idea what was going on. Everyone acted like crazy. It wasn't a famous hotel. The only thing less famous than the hotel itself are the clients of this hotel. So why would any photographer and or journalist be interested in this place?

Because they already had a reservation, they entered the hotel. Everything seemed normal, until they went on a dinner. They hadn't had a proper meal the whole day, so a restaurant in the hotel was what they were had been looking forward to.

After they recieved their meal, their happiness disappeared. It was disgusting, the steaks they ordered were dry like a shoe. Before they managed to chew those steaks, the a celebrity showed up. It was Gordon Ramsay, a famous chef. He was had been shooting his series "Hotel Hell" here. He asked everyone to leave. Unusual request, but not from him. That was it, he closed the kitchen. Everyone knew what that meant ... and regreted every bite.

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task. The story carries on from the prompt and includes a famous person and a request, so the target reader is fully informed.
Communicative Achievement	4	The conventions of a story, such as chronological development, narrative verb forms, and varying sentence length for dramatic effect, are used to hold the target reader's attention. Straightforward and complex ideas are communicated: *They had no idea what was going on*; *Everything seemed normal, until*; *They hadn't had a proper meal ...* ; *That was it*.
Organisation	3	The text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices: *So why would ... ? Because they already*; *After they recieved*; *those steaks*; *knew what that meant*.
Language	5	A range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, is used appropriately: *the clients*; *had a reservation*; *a proper meal*; *looking forward to*; *disgusting*; *to chew*; *a celebrity*; *showed up*; *a famous chef*; *shooting his series*; *regreted every bite*. A range of simple and complex grammatical forms is used with control and flexibility: *They had no idea ...* ; *The only thing less famous than the hotel itself*; *why would ... be interested*; *was what they had been looking forward to*; *He had been shooting his series*. There are a few errors, which do not impede communication.

✏️ Task: Part 2 – email

3. You have just received an email from your English-speaking friend, Jo.

From: Jo

Hi,

You know I've joined my local swimming team – well, I love it! We train every Tuesday and Thursday after school. Now my parents want me to go to an extra maths class on Tuesdays, so I won't be able to swim then.

How do you think I can persuade them to change their minds?

Write soon,

Jo

Write your **email**.

Sample answer 4

Hi Jo,

It is good to receive news from you! I bet you are swimming like a fish. Do you remember when we were kids and we made a few races in Angelina's pool?

I understand why you are trying to persuade them but remember that they want your best. If I were you firstly I would try to talk with your swimming coach and ask him about the possibilities of training another day. Then if the answer would have been negative I will ~~probably~~ try to do the same with yours future math teacher. I am sure that everyone knows the importance of practising sports while studying. So they will find a solution.

If everything ~~goes don't~~ doesn't happen as you and I expect ensure that your parents don't get mad with your decision. They are giving their best! Put your education in ~~front~~ first place. Opportunities to swim you will have a lot during your life. Moreover, you can come to Barcelone and try to catch me in the pool.

Good luck,

Sam

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All of the content is relevant to the task. The question in the input has been answered in detail, and the target reader is fully informed.
Communicative Achievement	4	Although the style is slightly formal in places, the conventions of the email genre have been used effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas: *Hi Jo*; *I bet you are swimming like a fish*; *Do you remember when*; *I understand why*; *If I were you*; *you can come to Barcelone and try to catch me in the pool*; *Good luck*.
Organisation	3	The text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices: *talk with your swimming coach and ask him*; *Then*; *the answer*; *do the same*; *so*; *Moreover*.
Language	3	A range of everyday vocabulary is used appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis: *swimming like a fish*; *kids*; *made a few races*; *pool*; *they want your best*; *coach*; *find a solution*; *ensure*; *giving their best*; *catch me*. A range of simple and some complex grammatical forms has been used with a good degree of control: *I understand … best*; *If I were you … another day*; *I am sure … solution*; *If everything … decision*; *Opportunities … your life*. The errors do not impede communication: *if the answer would have been negative I will try*; *yours*; *Opportunities to swim you will have*.

✎ Task: Part 2 – review

4. You see this notice in your school magazine..

Articles wanted

How to have fun without spending too much money

Life can be expensive – especially for teenagers!

Tell us how you and your friends have fun without spending a lot of money.

The best article will be published in next month's magazine.

Write your **article**

Sample answer 5

By watch a nature and birds are the best to take pleasure there is different feeling to have fun in nature. Nature make us happy and relive stressful. I think to Have fun it would be bether to stay with nature because ~~al~~ it is the best place to have fun.

So, It would be better to have fun in Nature with friends.

~~W~~ We went ~~this~~ last Saturday to Chiseni for traking and which we was climbing ~~that~~ we saw many trees and fruits we also saw water fall and river we play there and by on the grass on the top ~~mid top~~ of at hill there was picnic spot where many people was doing picnic there. ~~Wheld~~ we also joint them as they invited to join them we had a lot of fun there by dancing sing and ~~By~~ having delicious food so, ~~I think~~ I suggest you to go such place where we can have a lot of fun and less money can be spend.

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task. The target reader is fully informed. The text describes how the writer and his/her friends have fun without spending a lot of money: *to Have fun it would be bether to stay with nature*; *we had a lot of fun there by dancing … ; less money can be spend*.
Communicative Achievement	4	Conventions of an article, such as using a personal narrative to illustrate a point and making a suggestion to the reader are used. The target reader's attention is held more effectively in the second part of the text, due to a lack of cohesion in the first paragraph. Straightforward ideas are communicated: *We went last Saturday to Chiseni*; *I suggest you to go such place*.
Organisation	2	The text has an overall organisation, with a progression of ideas, although cohesion within paragraphs is not always successful. There is a variety of linking words and cohesive devices: *because it is the best place*; *we also joint them*; *we play there*; *picnic spot where many people*; *as they invited*; *so, I suggest you*.
Language	2	There is some overuse of certain lexis in the first paragraph, but then there is some range of everyday vocabulary appropriate to the topic: *take pleasure*; *relive stress*; *climbing*; *water fall*; *picnic spot*; *delicious food*. Simple grammatical forms are used with a good degree of control: *Nature make us happy*; *to Have fun it would be bether to stay with nature*; *they invited to join them*; *we had a lot of fun there by dancing*; *less money can be spend*. Errors do not impede communication.

Extra resources

Lesson plans and resources for teachers

- Free resources for preparing learners for Cambridge English Qualifications
- Official preparation materials for the CEFR B2-Level Cambridge English Qualifications

Webinar recordings about teaching writing and giving feedback

- Preparing your learners online for Writing papers in Cambridge English Qualifications
- The 'Write' Criteria: Improving writing the right (and easy) way
- Different ways to give useful feedback on writing
- Writing at CEFR Level B2 and above

Write & Improve

- For learners
- For teachers and classes

Write & Improve uses technology developed at the University of Cambridge to mark English writing accurately in seconds. Learners submit their work and Write & Improve will give it a mark and show them the parts of their text that may need improvement.

Test and train

Available across all digital devices Test & Train delivers unique, easy-to-use practice through short, sharp workouts to maximise performance on exam day.

cambridge.org/testandtrain

Learn more about research into second language learning

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has published over 20 free and easy-to-read research papers about second language learning and teaching. Some papers which are especially relevant to this guide are:

- Developing young writers in ELT
- Giving feedback to language learners
- Specific Learning Difficulties in ELT
- Motivational aspects of using near peers as role models

Blank template to help teachers to assess learners' writing using the Writing Assessment Scale

A4 and **US letter** versions of this form are attached to this PDF, for you to print.

B2 First for Schools Writing paper – teacher assessment	
Task:	
Candidate:	
Content	Has the candidate answered the task? Have they done what they were asked to do? (Or have they missed anything from the question which they should have included? Have they written something irrelevant?)
Band:	Comments:
Communicative Achievement	Is the writing appropriate for the task? Has the candidate used a style which is appropriate for the specific communicative context? (Or have they written in a way that is not suitable – for example, using a very formal style in an email to a friend or ending an article with 'Love'?)
Band:	Comments:
Organisation	Is the writing put together well? Is it logical and ordered? (Or is it difficult for the reader to follow? Does it use elements of organisation which are not appropriate for the genre, like beginning an email with a title or starting every sentence in an article on a new line instead of using paragraphs?)
Band:	Comments:
Language	Is there a good range of vocabulary and grammar? Are these used accurately? (Or are there mistakes? Do these cause any confusion for the reader?)
Band:	Comments:

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