



Cambridge Assessment  
English

# Assessing writing for Cambridge English Qualifications: A guide for teachers

Cambridge

English Qualifications

B1 Preliminary

for Schools



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# Who this guide is for

Just like official examiners, teachers also 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 Cambridge English B1 Preliminary for Schools exam.

## About B1 Preliminary for Schools

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Tests reading, writing, speaking and listening skills</li> <li>✓ Shows that learners have mastered the basics in English, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading simple textbooks and articles</li> <li>• writing emails on everyday subjects</li> <li>• understanding factual information</li> <li>• showing awareness of opinions and mood</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The next step in a student's language-learning journey between A2 Key for Schools and B2 First for Schools</li> <li>✓ Targeted at the same CEFR level as B1 Preliminary but with content aimed at school-age learners rather than adults</li> <li>✓ Can be taken on paper or on a computer</li> </ul> |
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# 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 this guide, there are some real-life examples of assessed writing from the B1 Preliminary for Schools exam. But before you look at the real examiners' marks and comments, try applying the official assessment criteria to the written samples by yourself. Take time to reflect on whether you gave similar marks or made similar comments – why (or why not)?
- You can navigate the document by using the hyperlinks in the text and the buttons on each spread:

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# Key terminology

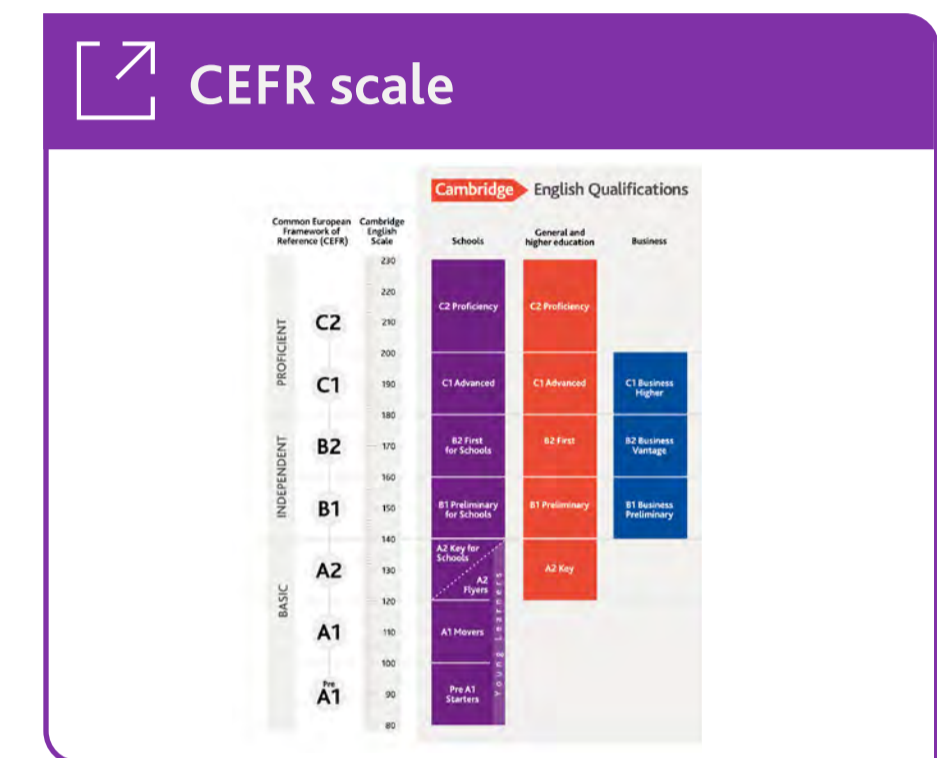
Language assessment is a specialist field and there is some common terminology which might be unfamiliar to you. Learning to recognise these terms will help you to understand this guide.

Definition	Cambridge English writing examiners say ...	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 an examiner considers when marking a piece of writing for an exam. For the B1 Preliminary 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 Cambridge English Qualifications. 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.



# 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 examiners will expect to see progression and different levels of ability in each exam:

	A2 Key for Schools	B1 Preliminary for Schools	B2 First for Schools
Descriptor	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.

## 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.

Cambridge English examiners consider these points when marking a piece of work:

<b>Content</b>	✓ The candidate answered the task. They done what they were asked to do.
	✗ The candidate did not include everything they were asked to. They have written something irrelevant.
<b>Communicative Achievement</b>	✓ The writing is appropriate for the task. The candidate used a style which is appropriate for the specific communicative context.
	✓ The writing is appropriate for the target reader. ✗ 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'.
<b>Organisation</b>	✓ 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.
<b>Language</b>	✓ There is a good range of vocabulary and grammar. They are used accurately.
	✗ Check the mistakes. How serious are they? Do the mistakes make it difficult for the reader to understand?

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, examiners give each piece of writing 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 B1 Preliminary for Schools exam, this generally indicates an ability of at least CEFR B1 level. Bands 1 and 2 indicate that the learner is still performing at A2 level.





## Teacher assessment

### ★ Top tips

- In class, encourage learners to practise reading the writing task very carefully. This will ensure they stay on topic and answer the question that has been asked. It will also help them achieve a good score for Content.
- Assessment isn't just about correcting mistakes, and three of the four Writing Assessment subscales in B1 Preliminary for Schools are not about language accuracy. So it's important to respond to what learners write, not just how they wrote it. **Activity 1** will help you practise this.
- In the classroom, assessment isn't the end of the writing process. If you give something back to a learner to correct or to write again, remember to check the next version and then give them feedback on this too.
- Formative assessment is about learning from feedback. It's not necessary to identify every mistake in every piece of writing. This can take a lot of time for you and give your learners the impression that they never do anything right! Just as we don't try to teach every grammar point in one lesson, we shouldn't try to develop every aspect of writing every time we give feedback. See **Activity 2** for an idea to focus attention on one area at a time.
- Feedback is very personal. Talk to learners about what feedback they appreciate and work together to find what works best for them.
- 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.



## Activity 1

### Assessment focus: Content and Communicative Achievement.

**Aims:** To demonstrate the value of writing for real communication; to motivate learners who are afraid of making mistakes; to provide useful evidence of how well learners can respond to email prompts.

#### Steps:

1. Send learners a short email, like the kind that appears in Task 1 of the B1 Preliminary for Schools Writing paper. Choose a topic that you really want them to respond to, such as *plans for our class party* or *how to improve our classroom environment*.

Make sure it includes:

- an opening sentence which states why you're writing
- a question which requires them to *explain* something to you
- a question which requires them to *suggest* something to you
- something at the end which requires them to ask or tell you something.

These are all typical parts of Task 1 of the exam, but by choosing a topic that is really useful for you and your class, learners will feel that this communication is more genuine – not just exam practice.

2. The learners should respond to your email with their own ideas.

3. Reply to their email naturally! You could:

- say what you liked about their ideas
- ask if they have any other suggestions
- suggest they talk to another learner who had similar ideas and plan something together.

4. Keep private notes for yourself about how well each of the learners answered your first email according to the **Content and Communicative Achievement** assessment subscales. The learners don't need this feedback now, but these notes will help you assess what they are already able to do in real-life email communication.

5. Remember that you originally selected a topic which you really wanted the learners to respond to. Make sure you reach a clear and natural conclusion together by continuing the plans or discussions verbally in class.

## Activity 1

6. Alternative approach to an email sent from the teacher:

- Ask learners to write an email to one of their classmates, inviting them to join in an activity they are going to do in the next few days or weeks.
- Give learners guidance on what to include with suggestions and preferences. Learners reply to the emails.
- This type of task enables learners to engage in authentic communication which relates to the real-life nature of the Part 1 task.
- This activity lends itself to peer assessment, where learners can evaluate how well they feel they have met the criteria.

7. Optional next steps:

- You could lead into Activity 2, below.



 Activity 2

**Assessment focus: Language accuracy – in whatever area you choose!**

**Aims:** To focus on specific areas which need development; to personalise feedback and build confidence; to develop learners' ability to check and correct their own work.

**Steps:**

1. Choose one or two things to focus on. For example, when practising story-writing for Part 2 you might focus on the use of past tenses, because these are important for the story genre and for the Language assessment subscale in the exam.
2. Let the learners know what you've chosen to focus on. See *Adaptation box*.
3. Set a writing task. Tell learners to pay particular attention to the area you're going to assess later.
4. Collect the writing. At the top of each learner's work, write a note of what you're focusing on (for example, 'past tenses for story-telling'). This helps you remember not to spend lots of time looking at other things, and also helps learners understand later why you have commented on only a few points.
5. Now mark each piece of work, focusing only on the area you've chosen:
  - If you find good work, mark it with a tick: ✓
  - If you find a mistake, circle it. Don't correct it.
6. Return the work to the learners and tell them:
  - to keep a record in their notebooks of anything you ticked, for example:

Date	Task	I can ...	Example
4 June 2020	Task 2: story	Use different past tenses to explain events	When <i>she walked</i> into the classroom, all the learners <i>were sitting</i> on the floor!

- to correct anything you've circled and give the work back to you for a second assessment.

 Adaptation – Activity 2

Ask learners to choose what they want your feedback on and provide them with options to choose from, for example, a specific grammar point you have been working on in class, text organisation or spelling. They could choose one thing for the whole class, or different learners could choose different things which are personal to them. This combines teacher assessment with self-assessment, which builds a good relationship between the teacher and learners and helps learners become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

**Peer assessment**
 Top tips

- Remind learners to think of their reader and who they are writing for. 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 their 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 teacher-centred or accuracy-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: Understanding how examiners apply the Organisation assessment subscale.**

**Aims: To improve learners' awareness of the importance of good organisation and how this can affect their exam marks.**

#### Steps:

1. Give learners the sample **Part 2 article task** from the end of this guide and ask them to:
  - highlight key information
  - brainstorm ideas
  - organise their ideas and make some notes about how this article should be organised.

Alternatively provide learners with a model answer. Ask them to think about what each paragraph focuses on. The model answer has the added advantage of enabling learners to see how cohesive devices are used in context.

2. Check their ideas and help them with anything they missed. Before the next step, remind learners that the article should:

- be about 100 words long in total
- have a title and/or opening sentence that presents the topic to the reader
- have full sentences to express their ideas, organised into paragraphs
- use linking words to connect ideas and sentences. (You should check here that the learners know some basic and more sophisticated linking words.)

3. Divide the class into two groups. Give one group **sample answer 4** and the other group **sample answer 5** from the end of this guide. Give both groups a copy of the task and the explanation of the **Organisation assessment scale** from this guide. Don't show them the examiner comments yet. Ask them to look at their sample answer and decide which mark to give it.

4. Now put the learners in pairs. Each pair should have one learner who looked at sample answer 4 and one learner who looked at sample answer 5. They should read each other's texts and compare, explaining the marks they gave.

5. Give each pair a copy of the examiner's comments about the organisation of these samples (available at the end of this guide).

### Activity 3

6. Finish the activity by asking the learners what they thought about this. For example, were they surprised by any of the examiner's comments? Did they agree on each other's marks? Why/why not?

7. Follow-up: give learners a different sample Part 2 article task from the B1 Preliminary for Schools exam. Ask them to write their answer for homework, taking as much time as they need, and to focus on the organisation of their writing. In the next class, they will swap with another learner and assess each other's writing.



## Activity 4

**Assessment focus:** The writing process – generating ideas based on a prompt.

**Aims:** To generate and maintain genuine interest and communication; to practise creative thinking and imagination; to provide learners with a safe space to write where they aren't worried about mistakes.

### Steps:

1. Tell learners to find an account on social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) where there are posts in English about topics which genuinely interest them. They should take a picture or screenshot of a post that they would like to respond to.
2. Ask them to share these posts in a safe closed group online, along with their own response (in English). This could be your class's own private Facebook or WhatsApp group, platform or a forum you might already use with your class, etc. (You might want to check the settings so that each post requires teacher approval before it is visible to other learners.)
3. Invite them to respond to each other's comments, just as they would normally on social media – but here, they must use English. Remind them to be polite and respectful to each other. See *Adaptation box*.

**Remember** the aims of this activity and don't interrupt with comments on the accuracy of their language. This kind of assessment can be done in other activities. Just monitor the activity to make sure the learners are working well together, but let them lead and manage the communication. They will appreciate this opportunity for autonomy and creativity.

## Adaptation – Activity 4

If access to social media or the internet is not possible, learners can respond (in English) to other written information in their environment, even if this information appears in another language. For example, they might want to text a friend about some graffiti they saw on the way to school or ask a question about a poster on the classroom wall. The point here is to promote genuine communication and ideas-sharing, and this can happen online or offline.

## 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 make 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 every time they do exam practice until they get an idea of what 100 words typically looks like in their own handwriting.
- 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.
- For extra practice, learners can use **Write & Improve**, a free online tool which has many exam-style tasks at different levels. Learners type and submit their answers, then receive immediate feedback. It also gives some tips about how to improve.

### 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: Comparing your work with a model; understanding how to apply the assessment subscales.**

**Aims: To raise learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses; to identify priorities for improvement.**

### Steps:

1. Set a task from the coursebook or a sample exam paper. You can find model questions and answers with examiner comments in the B1 Preliminary for Schools handbook. *See Adaptation box.*
2. Collect and mark the learners' writing. Make a private note of the marks you gave each piece of writing, but don't share these with the learners yet.
3. Return the writing to the learners with no marks or comments, but with a copy of the model answer. Ask them to compare their answer with the model answer and identify two things they think are good in the model answer and which they would like to 'borrow' the next time they write. This 'borrowing' technique means that weaker learners can find areas to improve and stronger learners, who already wrote a good answer, can find inspiration or new ideas that help them continue to develop.
4. Now give the learners your own marks and ask them to compare their assessments with yours. Did they identify the same areas for improvement?

### Adaptation – Activity 5

If you teach the same classes every term or every year, you might have some samples of strong learner writing on the same tasks, which you could use as models for future learners. But remember to remove the learners' names from these samples and ask their permission before sharing them.

## Activity 6

**Assessment focus: Identifying priority areas to develop.**

**Aims: To raise learners' self-awareness; to make sure they read teacher feedback carefully and respond to it.**

### Steps:

1. Ask learners to create a portfolio by collecting several pieces of their writing (approximately 6–10 different texts) with the feedback they received from the teacher. Explain that they're going to look again at their feedback.
2. They should divide a blank piece of paper into four sections according to the B1 Preliminary for Schools assessment subscales: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. Spend some time together reviewing what these terms mean.
3. Give the learners time to look at the feedback on each piece of written work and make notes or simply write ticks (✓) on their paper in the right category for each corrective comment. For example, if the teacher corrected grammar three times on one piece of writing, they could put three ticks in the Language section of their notes, or write what the corrections were. *See Adaptation box.*
4. When they have done this for their whole portfolio, they should look at their checklist and identify which of the four areas in their writing has been corrected the most.
5. Optional: you could pair learners with peers who can teach them how to improve. For example, a learner who has difficulty organising their writing can ask for help from a peer who is really good at this.
6. Give the learners extra practice for homework in the area they've identified or ask them to focus on this in their next piece of writing.

### Adaptation – Activity 6

If your learners need a confidence boost and you know you've given plenty of positive feedback, you could reverse the focus of this activity – instead of categorising your corrections, they could categorise your praise. This will help them see which areas they're really good at.

## Activity 7

**Assessment focus:** Communicative Achievement and text organisation for the story-writing task in Part 2, Question 3.

**Aims:** To give learners practice using narrative tenses, to stimulate creative thinking for the story-writing task.

### Steps:

1. Ask learners to keep a diary of what they did the previous day, or the previous week.
2. Encourage them to be creative, adding extra information and recording events in a more exaggerated fashion, to make their writing more interesting.
3. Ask them to use their diary and turn it into a story called My Week.
4. This activity can be extended by running a class story-writing competition.



# How to assess writing for B1 Preliminary 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 B1 Preliminary for Schools Writing test has two parts and lasts for 45 minutes in total. Candidates for this exam have to show that they can write different types of text in English.

	Part 1: Writing an email	Part 2: Writing an article or a story
How many tasks are there?	One. The candidate must answer this task.	Two. The candidate must choose one task to answer.
How many marks are there?	20 (maximum)	20 (maximum)
What do candidates have to do?	Write about 100 words. They must answer the email in the question and use the notes which are provided.	Write about 100 words. If they choose to write an article, they must use the topic provided in the question. If they choose to write a story, they must use the first sentence provided in the question.

## Writing Assessment subscales for B1 Preliminary for Schools

Writing for B1 Preliminary for Schools is assessed in terms of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. The detailed band descriptors are as follows:

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



These subscales and descriptors were designed to be used by Cambridge English writing examiners, 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 an example of a real exam task, a real response to that task and the comments given by a real Cambridge English writing examiner.

At the end of this section, you can find six sample responses written by real candidates in the B1 Preliminary for Schools exam, along with full examiner comments and band scores.

### Content

Band	Content	What does this mean?
5	All content is <b>relevant</b> to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	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.)
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole <b>informed</b> .	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, <i>say what ...</i> ) and some parts require more development (for example, <i>describe ...</i> or <i>explain ...</i> ).
1	<b>Irrelevances</b> and <b>misinterpretation</b> of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	The writer clearly didn't understand something in the task. (For example: a Part 2 task asked the candidate to write about what makes them laugh, but instead they wrote about things they enjoy in general.)  The writer included something that wasn't necessary or related to the task.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	

### 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 *fully informed*, *on the whole informed*, *minimally informed* and *not informed*. This should help you to compare the bands easily when you're looking at a piece of writing and trying to decide which mark to give it. For example:

**Question 1**  
Read this email from your English teacher Mrs Lake and the notes you have made.

**EMAIL**

**From:** Mrs Lake  
**Subject:** End of year party

Dear Class,

I'd like our class to have a party to celebrate the end of the school year.

We could either have a party in the classroom or we could go to the park. Which would you prefer to do?

What sort of activities or games should we do during the party?

What food do you think we should have at the party?

Reply soon!

Anna Lake

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

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

**Great!** Your learner used all the notes, except they didn't fully explain this note. They wrote 'I'd like to go to the park' but did not give any more information about why. The reader is **not fully informed** but all the other content in their answer was **relevant to the task**. This means they fall between Bands 3 and 5 on the Content subscale and would probably be assessed as Band 4 for this subscale.

**Explain**

**Suggest ...**

**Tell Mrs Lake**



## Communicative Achievement

Band	Communicative Achievement	What does this mean?
5	Uses the <b>conventions of the communicative task</b> to <b>hold the target reader's attention</b> and communicate straightforward ideas.	<p>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!</p> <p>This is a good thing! It means the reader is interested, not distracted, and it's not difficult for the reader to make sense of the text.</p>
3	Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate <b>straightforward ideas</b> .	These are usually concrete, limited in subject and are communicated with relatively simple style, words and grammar.
1	Produces text that communicates <b>simple</b> ideas in simple ways.	These typically require only one or a few words to communicate. For example, <i>I like pop music</i> or <i>Let's go next week</i> .

### ✓ A real example

#### Question 1

Your English teacher has asked you to write a **story**.

Your story must begin with

'I couldn't believe what I saw when I walked into the classroom.'

Write your **story**.

*The teacher couldn't believe what she saw when she opened the door of the class room! There was a Runway, with models, bloggers and every person fashionist in the world. The teacher at the beggining was mad, but later she started so happy and she fun, like everyone. The runway and party later have a lot of entertainment, good music, the food was very delicious. I was fun so much, I meet amazing people, I dance. It was an incredible day, but I have my punishment with the teacher to the end.*

#### Examiner comments on Communicative Achievement:

The text uses the conventions of story writing, in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas. There is a simple narrative development (beginning, middle and end), although the switching from third to first person is a little confusing. The conclusion is also a little unclear.

**Band: 3**



## Organisation

Band	Organisation	What does this mean?
5	Text is <b>generally</b> well organised and <b>coherent</b> , using a <b>variety of linking words</b> and cohesive devices.	<p>Not in every way or every case, but most of the time.</p> <p>Easy to understand because the ideas and sentences are well connected.</p>
3	Text is connected and coherent, using <b>basic linking words</b> and a limited number of <b>cohesive devices</b> .	<p><b>Basic linking words</b> show an explicit connection between ideas and sentences. These include <i>for example, because, finally</i> and so on.</p> <p>Linking words are one type of <b>cohesive device</b>, but cohesive devices include other words and phrases that connect ideas and words within a text, such as pronouns (<i>she, theirs</i>, etc.), substitution (<i>the last one, this</i>, etc.), relative clauses (... <i>which is why</i> ...) and so on.</p>
1	Text is connected using basic, <b>high-frequency linking words</b> .	<b>High-frequency linking words</b> include <i>and, so, because, first of all</i> and so on.

## ✓ A real example

### Question 2

You see this announcement in your school English-language magazine.

#### Articles wanted!

#### WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

Write an article telling us what you find funny and who you enjoy laughing with.

Do you think it's good to laugh a lot? Why?

The best articles answering these questions will be published next month.

Write your **article**.

I have got many friends **who** can make me laugh. I am a big optimist, so I love laugh. I laugh every time when I am at school, at home, in the park, simply everywhere. My dad always makes my laugh, because he is very funny adnd **his** funny stories are the best of the best. If I am alone, I usually watch comedies. But the best comedy serial The Simpsons. The yellow family is the funniest family **which** I know. My favourite type of joke is black joke. **It** is bad, but funny. When I am surfing on the Internet I'm always searching videos called "Try not to laugh". I can't accept **it** because **it** is too funny.

#### Examiner comments on Organisation:

The text is coherent throughout and connected, using basic linking words, such as *so, because, but* and a limited number of **cohesive devices**, such as referencing and pronouns (*it, which, who*). The candidate could have improved the organisation of the text by using longer sentences and more linking between sentences, as well as paragraphing.

**Band: 3**



## Language

Band	Language	What does this mean?
5	Uses a range of <b>everyday vocabulary</b> appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of <b>less common lexis</b> .	<b>Everyday vocabulary</b> means words or phrases that are used often in the context mentioned in the task. For example, when talking about a picnic in the park, people often mention a <i>blanket</i> and <i>snacks</i> .
	Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a <b>good degree of control</b> .	<b>Less common lexis</b> is vocabulary which is understandable but not often used in this context, such as <i>gourmet food</i> or <i>seating arrangements</i> .
	Errors do not impede communication.	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.
3	Uses everyday vocabulary generally <b>appropriately</b> , while occasionally <b>overusing</b> certain lexis.	Vocabulary is <b>appropriate</b> when it fits the context of the task and the other words around it. For example, if a candidate writes <i>Big snow makes getting around the city difficult</i> in an article, the expression <i>getting around the city</i> is appropriate for the style of an article but <i>big snow</i> is not appropriate, because the usual expression is <i>heavy snow</i> .
	Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control.	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.
	While errors are noticeable, <b>meaning can still be determined</b> .	<i>Big snow</i> 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.
1	Uses <b>basic vocabulary</b> reasonably appropriately.	This is the kind of vocabulary you need for basic survival – simple transactions, for example.
	Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control.	
	Errors may impede meaning at times.	

## ✓ A real example

### Writing

1. Read this email from your English teacher, Mrs Rose, and the notes you have made.

EMAIL

From: Mrs Rose  
Subject: New film club

I'd like to start an after-school Film Club.

We can meet either on Monday or Friday afternoon. Which one would you prefer?

Which types of film would you like to see?

I want to provide some food and drink during the films. Is this a good idea?

Please let me know what you think.

Many thanks!

*That's great* (points to 'I'd like to start...')

*Explain* (points to 'Which one would you prefer?')

*Explain which* (points to 'Which types of film...')

*Give your opinion* (points to 'Is this a good idea?')

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

Hello Mrs Rose

Oh, new film club is great idea. It sounds really grait.

I prefer Friday, because it should be a nice end of the week to watch some films on Monday, you have to prepare for the school and watching films, it is for me wasting of time when the school week is starting. I really like sci-fi, but I don't mind any different types of films. I will let it up to you which film will you bring. I don't think so, that is a good idea, because after we'll end we must clear a class and I think it can take so much time.

So these are my ansers

See you soon RICHARD

### Examiner comments on Language:

Everyday vocabulary is generally used appropriately. Simple grammatical forms are used and some sentences show an attempt, not entirely successful, to produce more complex language. The errors are noticeable, although these frequently arise as a result of trying to use more ambitious vocabulary and to express more complex ideas and time relationships. Despite the errors, the meaning can still be determined.

**Band: 3**



## Try it yourself!

Now, you'll find six sample answers from real B1 Preliminary for Schools candidates, including the ones we looked at above. These include the band scores and full comments given by real Cambridge English writing examiners. 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 B1 Preliminary for Schools exam.

You'll find a **blank photocopiable 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 B1 Preliminary for Schools band descriptors on **page 25**.



# Sample tasks with examiner comments

## Part 1

### Task – email

#### Writing

Write your answer in about 100 words in an appropriate style on the opposite page

1. Read this email from your English teacher, Mrs Rose, and the notes you have made.

**EMAIL**

**From:** Mrs Rose  
**Subject:** New film club

I'd like to start an after-school Film Club. *That's great*

We can meet either on Monday or Friday afternoon. Which one would you prefer? *Explain*

Which types of film would you like to see? *Explain which*

I want to provide some food and drink during the films. Is this a good idea? *Give your opinion*

Please let me know what you think.

Many thanks!

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



★ Top tip

Before you read the examiner's comments, try making your own assessment using the subscales. Then, compare your assessment with the band scores and comments given by the real examiners.

 Task – email

Sample answer 1

**Good afternoon Mrs Rose**

*I just got your email and I think it's really great idea because I think lots of people like watching films.*

*I personally would prefer Mondays because on Fridays I often have other plans with my family*

*I would really love to see some detective or some action films but I relly do't mind watching something different.*

*I think it's good idea to have some food or drink during the film because lots of people are used to it because in cinemas they always eat something so i think it would be great*

**Have a nice day**

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	<p>All content is relevant to the task.</p> <p>The target reader is fully informed about all the points in the task and there is a direct and clear response to each one in turn.</p> <p>The candidate covers the first point, <i>I think it's really great idea</i>, and clearly says which day they would prefer and explains why. The candidate explains which types of films they would like to see, and gives an opinion about providing food and drink during the films.</p> <p>This script therefore obtains a 5 for content as the content points are addressed and appropriately developed.</p>
Communicative Achievement	5	<p>The conventions of an email are used, with opening and closing salutations appropriate for the candidate's context, and there is also a reference to the input email at the beginning: <i>I just got your email</i>. The register is consistent and appropriate.</p> <p>The email holds the reader's attention throughout, and communicates straightforward ideas in direct response to the input email. Points are expressed and explained very clearly.</p>
Organisation	4	<p>The email is well organised and always coherent, with a clearly demarcated short paragraph for each point.</p> <p>There is some use of referencing as a cohesive device: <i>lots of people are used to it; so i think it would be great</i>, and the text flows naturally, although there is over-reliance on some linking words, such as <i>because</i>.</p>
Language	4	<p>A range of everyday vocabulary appropriate for the topic is used: <i>detective or some action films; I personally would prefer; other plans with my family</i>.</p> <p>There is a good degree of control of language: <i>but I relly do't mind watching something different; lots of people are used to it; in cinemas they always eat something</i>. There are very few errors and none which impede communication.</p> <p>The candidate could improve their language mark by evidencing more use of complex grammatical forms, and more variety in sentence structure.</p>



Sample answer 2

Hey! That's great!

I'm doesn't prefer Monday afternoon is doesn't possible to me, because I have tennis classes after school, and next. I am going with Laura houses, and Friday is perfect. For me, I don't have nothing, do you like this day?

My favorite types of the films is comedi and romantic film, and in the film club was another, and you like, we can see, I don't have any prolem to the film.

Yes, is a very good idea, I am buying some pop corn and a botle water or and sweets I don't know, were you buy in

Kises

WRite me soon and see you soon

Clara!

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task and each point is addressed and developed. The target reader is fully informed in terms of content, and there is information to develop the three main content points.
Communicative Achievement	2	There is an attempt to use the conventions of the communicative task, although this is sometimes inappropriate, for example in the closing salutations. The target reader has to make an effort to follow the ideas in places, but overall the points and message are communicated: <i>My favorite types of the films is comedi and romantic film; Yes is a very good idea, I am buying some pop corn ... and sweets ...</i>
Organisation	2	The email is organised overall in that it covers each point in turn, sometimes using paragraphing to separate the points. The text is connected using basic linking words: <i>because; and; and next.</i> However, the organisation of sentences and use of punctuation, relying heavily on commas, results in a style more suitable for informal, spoken language rather than that of an organised written communication: ... <i>because I have tennis classes after school, and next. I am going with Laura houses, and Friday is perfect. For me, I don't have nothing, do you like this day?</i>
Language	1	Basic vocabulary is used reasonably appropriately: <i>tennis classes, romantic film, sweets.</i> There is some degree of control of language at times: <i>I have tennis classes after school, and next. I am going ...; Friday is perfect. For me; do you like this day?</i> However, the numerous errors and lack of control impede meaning at times: <i>I'm doesn't prefer Monday afternoon is doesn't possible to me; ... and in the film club was another, and you like, we can see, I don't have any prolem to the film; ... or and sweets I don't know, were you buy in.</i>



Sample answer 3

Hello Mrs Rose

*Oh, new film club is great idea. It sounds really grait.*

*I prefer Friday, because it should be a nice end of the week to watch some films on Monday, you have to prepare for the school and watching films, it is for me wasting of time when the school week is starting. I really like sci-fi, but I don't mind any different types of films. I will let it up to you which film will you bring. I don't think so, that is a good idea, because after we'll end we must clear a class and I think it can take so much time.*

*So these are my ansers*

*See you soon RICHARD*

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	<p>All content is relevant to the task. The candidate addresses the first three notes in the input email (<i>Oh, new film club is great idea. It sounds really grait; I prefer Friday ... starting; I really like sci-fi ... bring</i>). The final point is also addressed; the reader may have to refer to the original email to check what is being referred to, but this is acceptable.</p> <p>The target reader is fully informed in terms of content, and there is information to develop the points.</p>
Communicative Achievement	3	<p>The text uses the conventions of an email communication, although it lacks any kind of closing salutation or sign-off suitable for the target reader (a teacher).</p> <p>Straightforward ideas are expressed about the club, which day to hold it on, which type of films to show and whether to provide food and drink or not.</p> <p>The tone and register are appropriate throughout and the opening salutation may well be suitable in this candidate's context.</p>
Organisation	3	<p>The script is connected and coherent. Basic linking words, such as <i>because</i>, <i>but</i> and <i>and</i> are used, together with a limited number of cohesive devices, mainly in the form of referencing (<i>it, that</i>).</p>
Language	3	<p>Everyday vocabulary is generally used appropriately, for example <i>a nice end of the week; to prepare for the school; sci-fi; so much time</i>.</p> <p>Simple grammatical forms are used and some sentences show an attempt, not entirely successful, to produce more complex language, e.g. ... <i>because after we'll end we must clear a class and I think it can take so much time</i>.</p> <p>The errors are noticeable, although these frequently arise as a result of trying to use more ambitious vocabulary (<i>let it up to you; clear a class</i>) and to express more complex ideas and time relationships. Despite the errors, the meaning can still be determined.</p>



 Task – article

**Question 2**

You see this announcement in your school English-language magazine.

**Articles wanted!**

**WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?**

Write an article telling us what you find funny and who you enjoy laughing with.

Do you think it's good to laugh a lot? Why?

The best articles answering these questions will be published next month.

Write your **article**.

---

**Sample answer 4**

*What makes me laugh? Pretty much everthing. I can start laughing simply from watching my cat trying to catch a laser dot on the wall, or a fly. And I laugh even more with my friends and family. It is practically the only way we are spending with ourselfs ourselves. We are making jokes, laughing at something or telling funny stories about our trips, days at school or our pets.*

*I think it is important to laugh a lot, because it makes everyday stress easier to handle or it simply wears off! And it makes you look happy, optimistic and ready for a challenge.*

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task and the candidate has addressed all the questions in the input announcement.  The target reader is fully informed, and there is development of the points, in particular of <i>who you enjoy laughing with</i> and the last two questions in the input announcement.
Communicative Achievement	5	The candidate uses the conventions of the communicative task of an article successfully, such as the opening question echoed from the input announcement, to obtain the reader's interest and attention; an appropriate informal register and engaging style, which holds the reader's attention throughout; and a clear and motivating concluding paragraph.  Straightforward ideas are communicated in an entertaining way: <i>I can start laughing simply from watching my cat trying to catch a laser dot on the wall, or a fly. And I laugh even more with my friends.</i>
Organisation	4	The article is generally well organised and coherent, using linking words and some cohesive devices: <i>I can start laughing ... And I laugh even more; It is practically the only way; And it makes you look happy.</i>
Language	4	The candidate uses a range of vocabulary appropriately: <i>Pretty much; It is practically the only way; making jokes; telling funny stories; it makes everyday stress easier to handle or it simply wears off ... happy, optimistic and ready for a challenge.</i>  Simple grammatical forms are used with a good degree of control, for example, <i>I can start laughing simply from watching my cat trying to catch a laser dot on the wall.</i> However, the language is less accurate in the second part of the first paragraph and present continuous is used incorrectly: <i>... the only way we are spending with ourselfs</i> (candidate corrects to <i>ourselves</i> ).



Sample answer 5

*I have got many friends who can make me laugh. I am a big optimist, so I love laugh. I laugh every time when I am at school, at home, in the park, simply everywhere. My dad always makes my laugh, because he is very funny and his funny stories are the best of the best. If I am alone, I usually watch comedies. But the best comedy serial The Simpsons. The yellow family is the funniest family which I know. My favourite type of joke is black joke. It is bad, but funny. When I am surfing on the Internet I'm always searching videos called "Try not to laugh". I can't accept it because it is too funny.*

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	3	<p>The target reader is on the whole informed, and knows what the candidate finds funny (Dad's jokes, The Simpsons, <i>black jokes</i> and the videos <i>Try not to laugh</i>) and who they enjoy laughing with (friends, Dad). There is considerable development of these ideas.</p> <p>There is no reference however to <i>Do you think it is a good idea to laugh or not?</i> and consequently the <i>Why/Why not?</i> questions in the prompt, which are completely omitted.</p>
Communicative Achievement	3	<p>The text uses an appropriate register and tone for an article, although there is very little idea of a target audience, or attempt to address readers and hold their attention.</p> <p>The text communicates straightforward ideas in response to the input prompt questions, e.g. <i>I laugh every time when I am at school, at home, in the park, simply everywhere</i>, and <i>But the best comedy serial The Simpsons</i>.</p>
Organisation	3	<p>The text is coherent throughout and connected, using basic linking words, such as <i>so, because, but</i> and a limited number of cohesive devices, such as referencing and pronouns (<i>it, which, who</i>).</p> <p>The candidate could have improved the organisation of the text by using longer sentences and more linking between sentences, as well as paragraphing.</p>
Language	4	<p>There is some ambition of range, in both vocabulary (<i>optimist, comedies, surfing on the Internet, searching</i>) and structure (<i>If I am alone, I usually watch comedies. The yellow family is the funniest family which I know</i>), which is largely successful.</p> <p>Overall, the text shows a good degree of control of language, with minimal and non-impeding errors, except for the use of <i>accept</i> which is distracting.</p>



 Task – story

**Question 1**

Your English teacher has asked you to write a story.

Your story must begin with

‘I couldn’t believe what I saw when I walked into the classroom.’

Write your **story**.

---

**Sample answer 6**

*The teacher couldn’t believe what she saw when she opened the door of the class room! There was a Runway, with models, bloggers and every person fashionist in the world. The teacher at the beggining was mad, but later she started so happy and she fun, like everyone. The runway and party later have a lot of entertainment, good music, the food was very delicious. I was fun so much, I meet amaizing people, I dance. It was an incredible day, but I have my punishment with the teacher to the end.*

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task. The story clearly and naturally follows on from the prompt sentence in the task: <i>There was a Runway with ... world.</i> The target reader is fully informed about the events in the story.
Communicative Achievement	3	The text uses the conventions of story writing, in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas. There is a simple narrative development (beginning, middle and end), although the switching from third to first person is a little confusing: <i>The teacher couldn't believe; The teacher at the beggining was mad, but later she started so happy and she fun, like everyone ... I was fun so much, I meet amaizing people, I dance.</i> The conclusion is also a little unclear: ... <i>but I have my punishment with the teacher to the end.</i>
Organisation	3	The story is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices: <i>There was ... and...; The teacher ... but later she ...; It was an incredible day, but ...</i>
Language	3	Everyday vocabulary is generally used appropriately, ( <i>models, bloggers; mad; entertainment; delicious; an incredible day; punishment. Runway</i> , presumably for catwalk, is confusing, but it is a specialised term for the level, and clear from context and the use of <i>models</i> and <i>fashionist</i> . Simple grammatical forms are used with reasonable control: <i>It was an incredible day; The teacher at the beggining was mad, but later she started so happy and she fun, like everyone.</i> Errors are noticeable, but meaning can still be determined: <i>she started so happy; she fun; ... later have a lot of entertainment; I was fun so much; I meet amaizing people; to the end.</i> In particular, there is inconsistent use of the simple past tense, and the candidate could have easily improved their writing by checking this, by carefully reading through the script before the end of the exam.





# Extra resources

## Lesson plans and resources for teachers

- [Free resources for preparing learners for 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](#)
- [B1 Preliminary and B1 Preliminary for Schools – revision and teaching ideas](#)

## 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.

## Penfriends

[Connect](#) with another school and find English-speaking pen pals to start exchanging cards with your learners.

## Learn more about research into second language learning

Cambridge University Press 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 teacher assessment template for assessing learners' writing using the Writing Assessment Scale

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

B1 Preliminary for Schools Writing paper – teacher assessment	
<b>Task:</b>	
<b>Candidate:</b>	
<b>Content</b>	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?)
<b>Band:</b>	Comments:
<b>Communicative Achievement</b>	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'?)
<b>Band:</b>	Comments:
<b>Organisation</b>	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?)
<b>Band:</b>	Comments:
<b>Language</b>	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?)
<b>Band:</b>	Comments:



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### A few facts and figures about us:

- 5.5 million assessments taken every year
- Accepted by over 25,000 organisations worldwide
- 2,800 exam centres in over 130 countries
- Over 52,000 preparation centres
- Providing English language assessment since 1913



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