CAMBRIDGE
ENGLISH

Assessing writing for Cambridge English Qualifications: A guide for teachers

Cambridge English Qualifications

A2 Key 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 A2 Key for Schools exam.

About A2 Key for Schools

✔ One of the official Cambridge English Qualifications

✔ Tests reading, writing, speaking and listening skills

✔ Shows that learners can:
  - understand and use basic phrases and expressions
  - understand simple written English
  - introduce themselves and answer basic questions about themselves
  - communicate with English speakers at a basic level

✔ Comes after the Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners and before B1 Preliminary for Schools

✔ Tests school-age learners at CEFR Level A2

✔ 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.

- Monitor and ask your learners which ideas and activities work well for them.

- At the end of the guide, there are several real samples of assessed writing from the A2 Key for Schools exam. Try using the assessment criteria with these samples, and then compare your marks with the real marks. How similar or different are your marks?

- 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	student / learner / pupil
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 A2 Key for Schools exam, these are: Content, 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.

⬈ **CEFR scale**
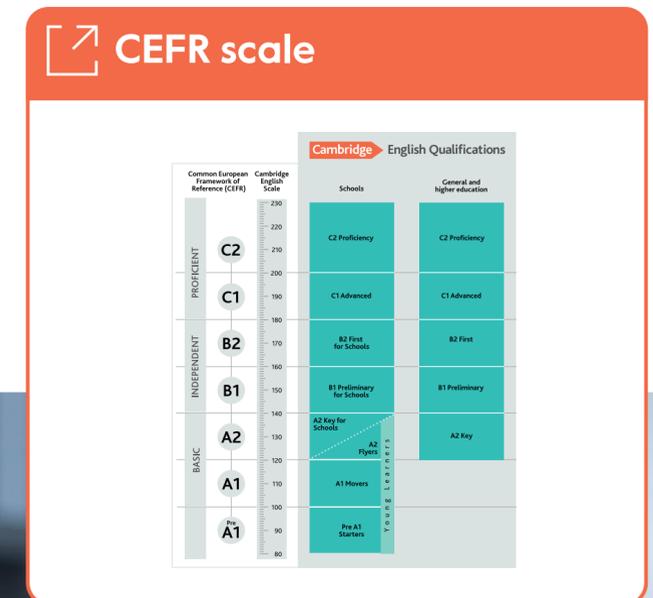
Understanding the Cambridge English Writing Assessment Scale

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 examiners will expect to see progression and different levels of ability 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 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 question. They have done what they were asked to do.
	✔ The candidate did not include everything they were asked to. They have written something irrelevant.
Organisation	✔ The structure of the writing is clear. The order of the ideas is logical.
	✔ It is difficult for the reader to follow. It is organised in a way which is not suitable for the task, like beginning an email with a title.
Language	✔ There is a good range of vocabulary and grammar. Language is used accurately.
	✔ Check the mistakes. Do these mistakes make it difficult for the reader to understand?

Some learners are stronger in one area and weaker in another area. For example, maybe they include all the points in the question (Content) but they also make frequent grammar and vocabulary mistakes (Language). In the exam, they will receive a separate mark (or band) for each subscale, from 0 to 5. That way, learners can see their areas of strength and weakness in all three of the assessment categories.

For example, if a candidate scores Band 5 for Content and Band 2 for Language, this means that they answered the question well, but that the grammar or vocabulary was not very accurate.

If a candidate's overall band score is 3 or higher in the A2 Key for Schools exam, this shows that their ability is at least CEFR A2 level. Bands 1 and 2 show that the learner's ability is below A2 level.

Subscales

Bands	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 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 A2 Key for Schools exam, learners should:

- have plenty of practice reading and writing the kinds of texts they will see in the exam – for the writing tasks, this means emails, short notes and short stories
- 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:

- 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 combine teacher assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment during an exam preparation course. This makes lessons more interesting. It's useful for learners to write for, and get feedback from, different readers, for example, their teacher and their classmates. A different reader will notice and give feedback on 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 is not just correcting mistakes. Two of the three Writing Assessment subscales in A2 Key for Schools are not about language accuracy. It's important to respond to what learners write, not just how accurately they write it.

- 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. **Activity 1** will help you practise this.

- 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 your learners will feel they can never do anything right! We don't try to teach every grammar point in one lesson, so we don't need to comment on every aspect of writing when we give feedback.

- It's important to help the weaker learners improve, but the stronger learners also need support to continue learning. **Activity 2** will help you to do this.

- 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.

- Different approaches to giving feedback are especially helpful for learners with Specific Learning Difficulties, such as dyslexia.

📄 Activity 1

Assessment focus: Language accuracy.

Aims: To show the importance of feedback so that learners read your comments; to help learners understand their common mistakes and how to correct these.

Steps:

1. Set the learners a writing task. When you collect the learners' writing, explain to the class that when you mark their writing, you are not going to correct their mistakes, but you are going to follow three steps. When you give back the learners' writing, explain each step to the class.

   - **1:** Tell learners you have put a circle around their mistakes, but you have not corrected their work. They have to correct the mistakes.

   - **2:** Collect the learners' writing again and tick (✔) anything that is now correct. If there are still mistakes, underline each one but don't tell them what is wrong with it. Make a suggestion about how to make a correction. For example, you could:

     - suggest a page in their coursebook which can help them find the correct spelling/grammar/vocabulary

     - write the first letter of the correction and write gaps for the remaining letters

     - remind them of the lesson when you studied this language point, so they can check their notes.

   - **3:** Learners work with a partner to discuss and see if they know how to correct the mistakes. Collect the learners' writing again and tick (✔) anything that is now correct. If there are still mistakes, now you can tell them how to correct them. You should also add a personal note to say 'well done' for trying. This activity focuses on mistakes, which can be very demotivating, so it's important to remind learners that they are still learning. It's okay to make mistakes, as long as they know they have tried their best.

2. Tell learners to keep a copy of this piece of writing in their folders or portfolios so they can look at it again in future. It might be helpful the next time you do this activity!

Activity 2

Assessment focus: Jigsaw activity working with subscales of Content, Organisation and Language.

Aims: Helping learners to understand the three subscales and to practise assessing a piece of writing.

Steps:

1. Explain to learners what examiners want to see when they mark the writing task. When learners write, they need to think about: Content, Organisation and Language. You can use the table in step 2 to help you explain what these mean.

2. Divide learners into three groups. One group focuses on Content, another group focuses on Organisation and the third group focuses on Language. Give them this simplified version of the table from page 7 of this guide to help them understand what the subscales mean.

Content	✔ The writer included every point and answered the question correctly.
	✔ The writer did not include all the points in the question, and wrote about something different.
Organisation	✔ The ideas are easy to follow. The writing is well organised into sentences and paragraphs. It looks like an email, a note or a story.
	✔ The ideas are difficult to follow. The writing is not well organised. It doesn't look like an email, a note or a story.
Language	✔ The writer uses a wide range of vocabulary and grammar, and uses the language correctly.
	✔ Look at the language mistakes. Do the mistakes make the writing difficult to read and understand?

3. Learners discuss their subscale in their groups. Ask groups questions about their subscale to check they understand it, and encourage them to ask you questions about it. For example – Why is it important to read the question before writing? Why is it important to organise ideas clearly? Why is it important to check spelling and grammar?

4. Show learners the example Part 7 task with sample answer 3 from this guide. Ask each group to award points out of five for Content, Organisation or Language. Tell them that 5/5 is the top mark. They should spend 5 to 10 minutes doing this, including enough time to read, discuss and decide on the score with their group.

5. Now mix the learners into new groups. Each new group should contain one learner who looked at Content, one who looked at Organisation and one who looked at Language. Get them to share their ideas and ask each other these two questions:
   - What score did you give and why?
   - How could we improve this writing?

Activity 2

6. Bring the whole class together. Discuss the scores they gave. Did they find it easy or difficult to agree on the scores and why? What changes would they make to the writing? After some discussion show the class the marks the piece of writing was given. (These are available near the end of this guide: see **Part 7, sample answer 3**.) Ask the learners if they are surprised about anything and if so, why.

7. **Stretch option – for a group of strong learners**

   Ask learners to think about how this candidate could improve their story. If they have difficulty thinking of ideas, ask them if they can think of:
   - different vocabulary or phrases (e.g. 'pack a bag')
   - more complex grammar (e.g. 'Before we left, we packed a bag with fruit, sandwiches and orange juice …')
   - a wider range of linking words and dramatic narrative expressions (for example, 'Suddenly', 'What a …!', etc.).

   For homework, learners can re-write the story, improving it in the ways they suggested. (See the example below.) You should collect their new versions and give them feedback. Is it an even stronger response now? Why/why not? (Remember to praise their efforts, not only their use of language.)

✔ Example of improved story

… **packed a bag** with **delicious snacks** like fruit, sandwiches and orange juice

… my **best** friends **from school, Tom, Lucy and Michel**.

Last Saturday I went to a picnic with my friends. First, we put the fruits, sandwitch and orange juice in my bag, then we went. When we arrived at the camping, we ate on the floor. Then Tom and Lucy went to the lake and Michel and me saw them.

…**Michel and I watched** Tom and Lucy **swimming in the lake all afternoon**.

⬡ Adaptation – Activity 2

In step 7, if learners have difficulty thinking of alternative words and phrases, the teacher could supply a list of suggestions for the learners to choose from. This encourages them to make decisions about word choices, and helps them to build their vocabulary.

Peer assessment

⭐ Top tips

- It helps learners to think about who is going to read their writing. In the assessment subscales, this person is called the 'target reader'. In the classroom, the reader can be the teacher or another learner. In the exam, the reader could be a teacher or a peer. It helps to practise writing for the target reader.

- Some learners can feel nervous and uncomfortable about getting feedback from a classmate instead of from the teacher, because they are worried about making mistakes. Talk to learners about peer assessment to help them understand that it will help them develop their writing skills. Explain that everyone has different strengths and they can learn from each other. Writing to a friend or classmate is good practice for the exam.

- Peer feedback is most effective when it's included as a regular part of a course, so that it feels normal. After learners get feedback from each other and re-write their texts, you could give teacher feedback as a final step.

- Encourage learners to start with the 'big picture' before they suggest changes and corrections. Ask them to start by reading the task without a pen/pencil, so that they read the whole text before looking at the mistakes. Learners often notice mistakes immediately and forget that writing is about communication! They should think about content and organisation first, and always give positive feedback before making suggestions for changes.

📖 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 the Organisation assessment subscale.

Aims: To help learners understand how emails are organised, which will help them organise their own writing in Part 6 of the Reading and Writing paper.

Steps:

1. Give learners three examples of short emails. You can find these in most coursebooks, or you could also use a strong sample exam answer from the **A2 Key for Schools Handbook**.

2. Put learners in small groups to think about the organisation of the emails and play 'Spot the Difference'. Create a checklist for learners from the following ideas:
   - How do the emails begin?
   - How do they end?
   - Which email is easiest to understand? Why?
   - Which email is most difficult to understand? Why?
   - Do the emails include all the information from the question? Is anything missing in any of the emails?
   - What information comes first? What information comes last? Is this the same or different in all the emails?
   - How many words are in each email? How many sentences?
   - Are there any linking words or phrases in the emails?

3. Now ask learners to turn over the paper so they can't see the emails.

4. A **PDF** of an example email is attached. Copy and cut up one email for each group of students. In their groups, they must work together and put the sections in the correct order.

5. Ask learners to look again at the first three complete emails. Did they organise the cut-up email in a similar or different way? Why/why not?

6. Talk to the learners about why organisation is important for Part 6 of the Reading and Writing paper in their exam. For example:
   - they need to use the correct structure for an email, with a greeting and a sign-off, so that it looks like an email and not a note or a story
   - some things are common in English emails, which are different in other languages (for example, the first sentence of an English email begins with a capital letter, but this is not true in all languages).

7. Follow-up: give learners the original task attached to the emails they looked at in the lesson or a sample **Part 6** task from the A2 Key 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. This is part of the band for Organisation. In the next class, they will swap with another learner and they can assess each other's writing for Organisation.

✔ Example email for Activity 3

A **PDF** of the following example is attached for you to print.

Hi Pat,

✂ ....

I am so happy to going shopping tomorrow

✂ ....

because I want to buy new football boots.

✂ ....

We can meet at your house at 11:00.

✂ ....

Is it OK for you? Then we take a bus.

✂ ....

📄 Activity 4

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

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

Steps:

1. Bring three pictures to class that learners can connect to make a story. The pictures could be people or animals. Talk about the pictures with the learners, discussing vocabulary and ideas connected to the pictures. You can put the three pictures on the board and build a story together.

2. For the next class, learners bring three pictures of their own. These pictures should include people or animals. They could be photos the learners have taken, or pictures they found online. All three pictures should be connected in some way – for example, they might choose three pictures from the same birthday party. Make sure they know what kinds of pictures are appropriate for class!

3. In class, put learners into pairs. They decide which of the two sets of pictures they want to use to create their story.

4. When they have planned their stories, put each pair with another pair to tell their stories. The other pair can ask questions or make suggestions to make the story even better.

5. Invite a few pairs to share their story with the rest of the class.

6. If doing the paper-based test, now learners write their short stories, connecting all three pictures, just like in Part 7 of the A2 Key for Schools Reading and Writing paper. They could do this in pairs in class, or individually for homework.

7. Collect the writing, mark it, and let learners re-write it in a final clean version. You could then display these final drafts on the classroom wall so learners can enjoy and feel proud of their creative work!

⬡ Adaptation – Activity 4

Collect all the learners' pictures, mix them up and then give each pair of learners three pictures at random. They should imagine a story which connects all three pictures and write this together. Then pairs can read each other's stories and check whether they included the details of all three pictures. This is an important part of their exam, so it's important that learners remember to include all three pictures in their stories.

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 monitor their own learning.

- If doing the paper-based test, get learners to count the number of words in their writing when they do exam practice. They need to know what 25 words looks like in their handwriting when they are writing an email for **Part 6**, and what 35 words looks like when writing a story for **Part 7** – some learners have especially large or small handwriting! For the digital exams, the words on the screen are counted automatically.

- Some learners find writing very difficult in any language. You could 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: Accuracy – going back and checking your own work.

Aims: To help learners understand and correct their own common mistakes; to teach them to check their own work before submitting it to a teacher.

Steps:

1. For each learner, take a piece of their writing which you have already marked and that learners have corrected. (For example, you could choose something they wrote for **Activity 1.**)

2. Create a 'clean' copy of the writing, by removing each of the points that you previously corrected. The clean copy should now look like a gap-fill exercise, as shown in the example email.

3. Give the learner the 'clean' copy. Ask them to complete their text with the missing words. It doesn't matter if they pick a different word, as long as it is grammatically correct. This should be easier than the first time they wrote the text, because they should have corrected and learned from their mistakes.

✔ Example email for Activity 5

Original text with teacher corrections	'Clean' copy for Activity 5
Hello Chris! Next Saturday we ^are coming (going) to the local museum. (Your) You must bring: bootle (bottle) of water, some food, and 5 Euro. We travel (at)(on) bus. ^will ^the ^by Goodbye!	Hello Chris! Next Saturday we _____ ___ ing to the local museum. Y___ must bring: b_____e of water, some food, and 5 Euro. We _____ travel ___ ____ museum ___ bus. Goodbye!

Activity 6

Assessment focus: Identifying stronger and weaker texts.

Aims: To show learners how hard they have worked and how much progress they have made; to boost learners' confidence in their written work.

Steps:

1. Tell learners they are each going to create a portfolio of their written work. A portfolio of work can be created either in hard copy or as a digital portfolio. This portfolio will be shown to their parents and to future students. This provides extra motivation to demonstrate their best work!

2. Learners should collect all their writing from the course so far. They should have at least three examples of a **Part 6** task (email) and at least three examples of a **Part 7** task (story) from the A2 Key for Schools Reading and Writing paper. The teacher should provide a copy of the original tasks, too, because learners might not have these.

3. Explain that their portfolio is an opportunity to show their best work, so learners' final portfolios do not need to include all of the examples they collected in step 2. Learners must read these pieces of writing again and choose only one **Part 6** response and only one **Part 7** response. They should choose texts which show their best work. Only these will go into their portfolio.

4. Learners take a blank piece of paper and create a new page for each task. This page should include:
   - the original question which they were answering
   - their writing in answer to the question
   - a short description of why they think this is their best work. For example:
     - ' This is my best Part 6 answer because I included all the parts of the question, I organised my email very well and I used good grammar and vocabulary.'
     - 'This is my best Part 7 story because I had very good ideas and I learned to use good language. I did not make the same mistakes as in my other writing tasks.'

5. These pages now go into the learner's portfolio.

6. Later in the course, perhaps at the end of the school year, you could add comments to the learners' portfolios before sharing them with parents or other teachers. It's very motivating for young learners to hear the positive opinions of adults and children who have a big influence in their life. This extra motivation will give them the confidence to continue improving their English.

Adaptation – Activity 6

If your learners like to use technology, they could create a digital portfolio using a tool like **Padlet**. They can scan and upload the original task and they could type their answer below it so it is clean and well presented for their parents and peers to read.

How to assess writing for A2 Key for Schools

The texts and tasks in Cambridge English Qualifications are designed to reflect real-world communication and to test what learners know and what they can do in English. This means that preparing learners for the Writing paper shouldn't be very different from developing and assessing their writing skills in the classroom. But learners need to practise the exam tasks and timings and become aware of the assessment scales, before they take the real exam.

The A2 Key for Schools Reading and Writing paper has seven parts and lasts for 60 minutes in total.

Parts 1 to 5 should take about 40 minutes. These parts focus on **reading** and include:

- answering multiple-choice questions on short texts (including text messages, notes and signs), and longer texts (including magazine/newspaper articles and web pages)
- completing gap-fill tasks (with and without multiple-choice options).

Parts 6 and 7 should take about 20 minutes. These parts focus on **writing**, and they are assessed as follows:

	Part 6: Writing an email	Part 7: Writing a short story
How many tasks are there?	One. The candidate must answer this task.	One. The candidate must answer this task.
How many marks are there?	15 (maximum)	15 (maximum)
What do candidates have to do?	Write a short email of 25 words or more. They must respond to all three of the prompts which are provided in the question.	Write a short story of 35 words or more. They must base their story on the three picture prompts.

Writing Assessment subscales for A2 Key for Schools

Candidates' writing for A2 Key for Schools is assessed for Content, Organisation and Language. The detailed band descriptors are as follows:

A2	Content	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	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.
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.	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.
2		*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*	
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Production unlikely to be connected, though punctuation and simple connectors (i.e. 'and') may on occasion be used.	Produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. Produces few simple grammatical forms with only limited control.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	*Performance below Band 1.*	

These subscales and descriptors were designed to be used by Cambridge English when marking Cambridge 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 A2 Key for Schools exam, along with full comments and band score

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 writer's English teacher.)

Would the reader have all the information they need? The task always tells the candidate what information to include.

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 7 task asks the candidate to 'write the story shown in the pictures', but instead they wrote a different story.)

The writer wrote about a different topic.

The writer did not provide information on all of the points.

👁 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:

The candidate has to say **three things** in their email.

Question 31

You are going shopping with your English friend Pat tomorrow.

Say:

• where you want to meet

• what time you want to meet

• what you want to buy.

Write **25 words** or more.

Write the **email** on your answer sheet.

Your student only said two of these things in their email. They wrote '*I'd like to meet in the park at 10:00*' but did not say what they wanted to buy. 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.

Organisation

Band	Organisation
5	Text is **connected and coherent**, using basic **linking words** and a limited number of **cohesive devices**.
3	Text is connected using basic, **high-frequency linking words**.
1	Production unlikely to be connected, though **punctuation** and simple connectors (i.e. *and*) may **on occasion** be used.

What does this mean?

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

Linking words are words which connect ideas and words in a text. For example, *and*, *so*, *because*.

Cohesive devices are other ways to connect ideas and words in a text. For example, using pronouns *she*, *theirs* or relative clauses ... *which* ...

Very common linking words, for example, *and*, *so*, *because*, *first of all*, etc.

For example, the learner uses capital letters (A, B, C, etc.) to show the beginning of a new sentence and full stops (.) to show the end of a sentence.

Not often or not consistently, so it's not clear that the learner really understands how to use these words.

✔ A real example

Part 7

Question 32

Look at the three pictures:
Write the story shown in the pictures.
Write **35 words** or more.
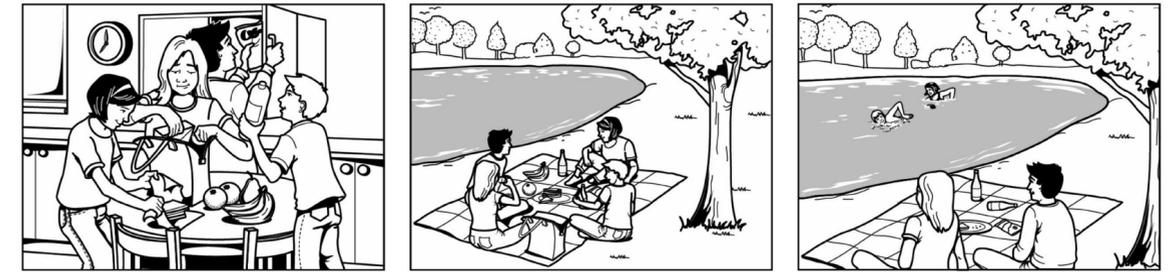
Last Saturday I went to a picnic with my friends. First, we put the fruits, sandwitch and orange juice in my bag, then we went. When we arrived at the camping, we ate on the floor. Then Tom and Lucy went to the lake and Michel and me saw them.

Comments on Organisation:

The text is connected and coherent. Basic linking words, *and*, are used to connect ideas within sentences, and past tenses and a limited number of cohesive devices are used appropriately to provide a narrative sequence to the text: *Last Saturday I went*; *First*; *then*; *When we arrived*; *Then*. Pronouns are also used to avoid repetition: *I went to a picnic with my friends*; *we*; *Tom and Lucy*; *them*.

Band: 5

Language

Band	Language
5	Uses **everyday vocabulary** generally appropriately, while occasionally **overusing** certain lexis Uses simple and grammatical forms with a **good degree of control**. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
3	Uses **basic vocabulary** reasonably appropriately. Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control. Errors may **impede meaning** at times.
1	Produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. Produces few simple grammatical forms with only limited control.

What does this mean?

Everyday vocabulary means words or phrases that are used often in the context mentioned in the task.

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.

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.

This is the kind of vocabulary you need for basic survival – simple transactions, for example going shopping, ordering food at a restaurant.

Some errors or mistakes are OK – they show evidence of learning. But if an error **impedes meaning**, this means the reader will probably have difficulty understanding what the writer is trying to say.

The candidate is unable to produce full sentences, and uses a limited range of grammatical structures that are often used inaccurately.

✔ A real example

Part 7

Question 32

Look at the three pictures:
Write the story shown in the pictures.
Write 35 words or more.

Mum, Katy, dad and Jim are preparing their bag for picnic on the picnic they have a lot of food when when they ate the food. Jim and Katy go swiming and they have a lot of fun.

Comments on Organisation:

Basic vocabulary related to the context is used reasonably appropriately: *preparing*; *bag for picnic*; *food*; *swiming*; *fun*. Simple grammatical forms, such as present tense forms, are used with some degree of control: *are preparing*; *they have a lot of food*; *ate the food*; *go swiming*; *they have a lot of fun*. Errors occur with punctuation and articles, which occasionally impede meaning: *for picnic on the picnic*; *a lot of food when they ate the food*.

Band: 3

🔧 Try it yourself!

Now, you'll find five sample answers from real A2 Key for Schools candidates, including the ones we've looked at. These include the band scores and full comments. Together, these will help you understand what to expect from learners with stronger, weaker and average abilities.

Before you check the comments, 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

· check whether they are ready to take the Reading and Writing part of the A2 Key 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. You should also refer to the detailed A2 Key for Schools band descriptors on **page 23**.

Sample tasks with comments

Part 6

✏️ Task: Part 1 – email

Part 6

Question 30

Your English friend is coming with you and your family to the local museum next Saturday.

Write an **email** to Chris.

Tell Chris:
· how you will travel to the museum
· what he can see at the museum
· what he needs to bring.

Write **25 words** or more.

⭐ Top tips

Before you read the comments, try making your own assessment using the official subscales. Then, compare your assessment with the band scores and real comments.

✏️ Task – email

Sample answer 1

Hello Chris! Next Saturday we coming to the local museum. Your must bring: bootle of water, some food, and 5 Euro. We can see many super since.

We travel at museum on bus.

Goodbye !

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	4	All content is relevant to the task. The target reader is on the whole informed about the three points in the message. There is information about how they will travel: *on bus*, and what Chris needs to bring: *bootle of water, some food, and 5 Euro*. The second point is less clear due to language errors, but the point is addressed: *We can see many super since*, possibly meaning *science*.
Organisation	3	The text is connected and the information is presented in a logical order with the help of appropriate opening and closing salutations: *Hello Chris*; *Goodbye*. There are some examples of high-frequency linking words, including a time reference: *Next Saturday*; *and*.
Language	3	Basic vocabulary related to the points in the task is used reasonably appropriately: *bootle of water*; *food*; *super*; *bus*. Although much of the vocabulary has been repeated from the input material, the candidate has manipulated most of it to fit the email. Simple grammatical forms, such as modal verbs and the simple present tense, are used with some degree of control: *we coming*; *must bring*; *We can see many*; *We travel*. Errors connected with spelling and prepositions sometimes impede meaning: *bootle of water*; *many super since*; *at museum on bus*.

✏️ Task – email

Part 6

Question 32

You would like to go to the park tomorrow. Write an **email** to your English friend Sammy.
In your email:
• ask Sammy to come to the park with you
• explain how you can both get there
• say what you can do there.
Write **25 words** or more.

Sample answer 2

I GOING TO THE PARK BEACAUSE IT IS VERY BEATIFUL.
I GET THERE BEACAUSE THEY'RE PLAY FOOTBALL, PLAY A KITE. I SEE THE BIRTH. IT'S RUNING.
I CAN BY BUS. IT'S VERY CHEAP BUT I CAN A TAXI

IT'S VERY EXPENSIVE

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	2	Although two parts of the message are communicated, the main purpose of the email, to invite Sammy to the park, has been omitted. There is also some irrelevant information when talking about the cost of transport. The target reader is on the whole informed as two parts of the message have been addressed. There is information about how the writer will get to the park: *I can by bus*, and what he can do in the park: *play football, play a kite*; *see the birth*; *runing*, although this is not clearly expressed due to language errors.
Organisation	2	High-frequency linking words are used to connect the text within sentences: *I going to the park beacause it is very beatiful*. However, there is a lack of connection between sentences, although there is evidence of punctuation: *I see the birth. It's runing*; *I can by bus. It's very cheap but I can a taxi it's very expensive*.
Language	2	Basic vocabulary, which is connected to the topic, is used reasonably appropriately: *beatiful*; *football*; *kite*; *runing*; *bus*; *cheap*; *expensive*. Simple grammatical forms, such as simple tenses and some simple modal verbs, are used with limited control: *I going*; *I get there*; *they're play*; *I can by bus*. There are a number of errors with spelling, some of which impede meaning: *beacause*; *beatiful*; *birth*; *runing*.

Part 7

✎ Task – story

Part 7

Question 32

Look at the three pictures:

Write the story shown in the pictures.

Write **35 words** or more.

Sample answer 3

Last Saturday I went to a picnic with my friends. First, we put the fruits, sandwitch and orange juice in my bag, then we went. When we arrived at the camping, we ate on the floor. Then Tom and Lucy went to the lake and Michel and me saw them.

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task. All three pictures have been referred to in the correct context of having a picnic by the lake: *put the fruits, sandwitch and orange juice in my bag*; *we ate on the floor*; *Tom and Lucy went to the lake*. The target reader is fully informed.
Organisation	5	The text is connected and coherent. Basic linking words, *and*, are used to connect ideas within sentences, and past tenses and a limited number of cohesive devices are used appropriately to provide a narrative sequence to the text: *Last Saturday I went*; *First*; *then*; *When we arrived*; *Then*. Pronouns are also used to avoid repetition: *I went to a picnic with my friends*; *we*; *Tom and Lucy*; *them*.
Language	5	Everyday vocabulary, which is suitable for the context depicted, is used generally appropriately: *picnic*; *friends*; *fruits*; *orange juice*; *bag*; *camping*; *floor*. Simple grammatical forms, including irregular verbs in the past tense, are used with a good degree of control: *I went to a picnic*; *First, we put*; *When we arrived*; *we ate*; *saw them*. There are a few noticeable errors, but meaning can still be determined: *to a picnic*; *fruits*; *sandwitch*; *camping*; *Michel and me saw them*.

Task – story

Sample answer 4

Mum, Katy, dad and Jim are preparing their bag for picnic on the picnic they have a lot of food when when they ate the food. Jim and Katy go swiming and they have a lot of fun.

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	5	All content is relevant to the task. All three pictures have been referred to in the correct context of having a picnic by the lake: *preparing their bag*; *when they ate the food*; *Jim and Katy go swiming*. The target reader is fully informed.
Organisation	2	The text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words, *and*; *when*, as well as pronouns to reduce repetition: *Mum, Katy, dad and Jim are preparing their bag*; *they*. Commas are used in the list of names, but sentence boundaries are not always clear.
Language	3	Basic vocabulary related to the context is used reasonably appropriately: *preparing*; *bag for picnic*; *food*; *swiming*; *fun*. Simple grammatical forms, such as present tense forms, are used with some degree of control: *are preparing*; *they have a lot of food*; *ate the food*; *go swiming*; *they have a lot of fun*. Errors occur with punctuation and articles, which occasionally impede meaning: *for picnic on the picnic*; *a lot of food when they ate the food*.

Task – story

Sample answer 5

Nati was a girl of eighteen years, and she leav, in London with her grandmother because there is a good education, but today she will come to visit us in Paris, we want to take her to a picnic, I think is going to be very fun!

Subscale	Mark	Commentary
Content	1	Although there is some reference to one of the pictures and the context in general: *we want to take her to a picnic*, there is some irrelevance in the amount of information given about the girl, Nati. The only information from the pictures which is communicated to the target reader is 'the picnic' and a group of people being involved. As such, the target reader is minimally informed.
Organisation	3	The text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words: *and*; *because*; *but*. There is a basic structure to the text, including the introduction of the girl and what the group are planning and why: *Nati was a girl*; *but today she will come*; *we want to*. However, commas are overused and the text consists of only one sentence.
Language	4	Basic vocabulary is used in a generally appropriate way: *grandmother*; *good education*; *take her to a picnic*; *very fun*. Simple grammatical forms, such as simple present, simple past and simple future tenses, are used with a good degree of control: *Nati was a girl*; *she will come to visit us*; *we want to take her*. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined: *she leav, in London*; *there is a good education*; *take her to a picnic*; *I think is going to be very fun*.

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

- Developing and assessing Writing skills
- Preparing your learners online for Writing papers in Cambridge English Qualifications
- Different ways to give useful feedback on writing

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.

A2 Key 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:
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 a story 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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