



How to teach the compulsory essay

Cambridge English: Proficiency
Writing Part 1



Aims of this webinar

- to highlight the purpose of Part 1 of the *Cambridge English: Proficiency* Writing test
- to discuss the skills assessed in Part 1 of the Writing test
- to explore the assessment criteria and level descriptors for C2 level
- to share some practical ideas for the classroom



The format of Part 1

What is the part 1 task?



Read the two texts below.

Write an essay summarising and evaluating the key points from both texts. Use your own words throughout as far as possible, and include your own ideas in your answers. Write your answer in 240–280 words on the separate answer sheet.

Does memory have a future?

A good memory is invaluable. The inability to make use of memory and past experience can be a severe limitation on how well we perform both mentally and physically. Nowadays, we rely on computers, mobiles and other electronic devices to store our most important information, which can be recalled at the touch of a button. However, some people are concerned that this reliance on electronic equipment may affect the development of our internal memory system in the future. It remains to be seen whether these concerns turn out to be true.

The role of memory

We like to think of our memory as our record of the past, but all too often memories are influenced by imagination. It is risky, therefore, to regard memory as a source of knowledge, because we will never be able to verify the accuracy of a memory fully. Although memory is an unreliable source of knowledge about the past, its importance in self-identity is unquestionable. When a person suffers memory loss as a result of accident or illness, one of the most distressing consequences is likely to be a loss of self. Indeed, it can be argued that a person's true identity resides in his or her collection of memories.



What is the Part 1 task?

- compulsory task: essay writing
- discursive essay
- two input texts, each approximately 100 words
- texts based on authentic, contemporary sources
- reading input within reading competence of C2-level candidates

Question 1

Please write within the grey lines

.....

.....

.....

.....



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Focus on the candidate

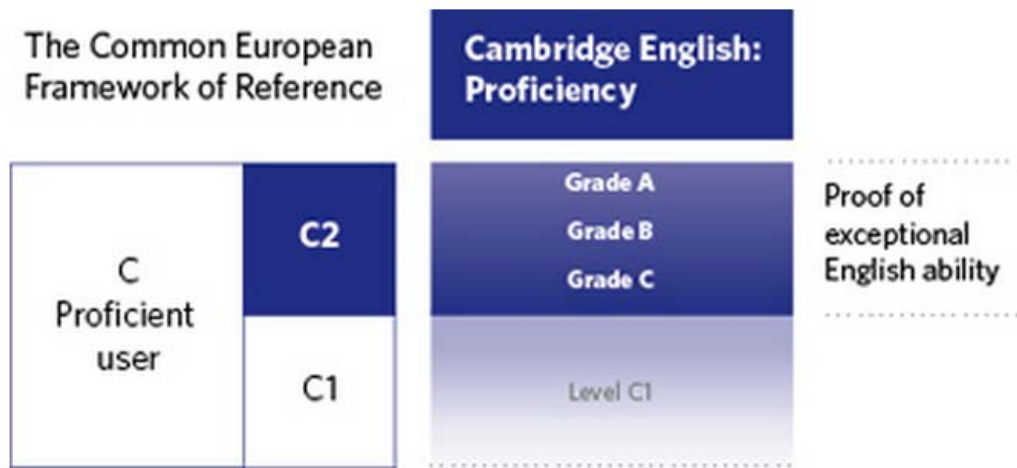
What is the part 1 task?



Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

At C2, learners should be able to

‘summarise information from different sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation of the overall result.’





Candidates need to:

- identify the main points
- summarise the main points
- write in an academic style
- use organisational patterns and linking devices
- draw conclusions from all the relevant information



In order to successfully complete the task, candidates must:

- A. hypothesise
- B. summarise information from two different sources
- C. describe a narrative
- D. reconstruct arguments and accounts
- E. present the overall result coherently
- F. suggest a solution
- G. express and justify an opinion
- H. evaluate abstract arguments



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B. summarise information from two different sources

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D. reconstruct arguments and accounts

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Some might argue that this is not an issue worth losing sleep over, after all, the human brain is not divided in watertight compartments which we can put our memories in, and thus our imagination can easily influence our recollection of the past, to the point that said recollection is no longer entirely accurate. For example, a historian would much rather base his or her research on any physical record of a specific event than on the personal retelling of said event made by a witness.

However, losing the ability to accurately describe events from the past is not what those who have voiced their concerns about the overuse of electronics to store information are worried about the most. In actuality, the most unfortunate consequence of a potential worsening of human memory would be the loss of resources to build and maintain a strong self-identity.

Of course, one is more likely to lose significant chunks of their memory by means of accident or illness, and claiming that an excessive use of electronics will inevitably lead to a collective crisis of identity would be blowing things out of proportion. But, at the same time, one can't help but wonder how this increasingly interconnected world will continue to sharpen our brains.



Cambridge English: Proficiency Writing

Assessment subscales



Assessment subscales

C2 Band	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language



Assessment subscales

C2 Band	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5				
4				
3				
2				
1				
0				



Assessment subscales

C2 Band	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
3				

Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present.
Target reader is, on the whole, informed.



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C2 Band	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is, on the whole, informed.			

Text is a well-organised, coherent whole, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with flexibility.



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3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is, on the whole, informed.		Text is a well-organised, coherent whole, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with flexibility.	

Uses the conventions of the communicative task with sufficient flexibility to communicate complex ideas in an effective way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.



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3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is, on the whole, informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task with sufficient flexibility to communicate complex ideas in an effective way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.	Text is a well-organised, coherent whole, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with flexibility.	



Cambridge English: Proficiency Writing

Language subscales



Language subscale

- A** Uses a wide range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, with fluency, precision, sophistication, and style.
Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and completely natural.
Any inaccuracies occur only as slips.
- B** Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately.
Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility.
Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication.
- C** Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, effectively and precisely.
Uses a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication.
Errors, if present, are related to less common words and structures, or occur as slips.



Language subscale

C2 Band	Language
5	Uses a wide range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, with fluency, precision, sophistication, and style. Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and completely natural. Any inaccuracies occur only as slips.
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>



Language subscale

C2 Band	Language
5	Uses a wide range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, with fluency, precision, sophistication, and style. Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and completely natural. Any inaccuracies occur only as slips.
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3	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, effectively and precisely. Uses a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication. Errors, if present, are related to less common words and structures, or occur as slips.
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1	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately. Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility. Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication.
0	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>



Language subscale

C2 Band	Language
5	Uses a wide range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, with fluency, precision, sophistication, and style. Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and completely natural. Any inaccuracies occur only as slips.
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>
3	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, effectively and precisely. Uses a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication. Errors, if present, are related to less common words and structures, or occur as slips.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>
1	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately. Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility. Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication.
0	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>



Cambridge English: Proficiency Writing Part 1

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What mark for Content?

The extensive use of electronic devices has had, and continues to have, an effect on our daily lives similar to that of the mechanical press back in Gutenberg's time: the ability to store information somewhere other than our brains. This, though arguably positive, has a downside that some people have pointed out: we don't get, or at least we're not forced to, exercise our memory as much as our Facebook-deprived ancestor's did.

Some might argue that this is not an issue worth losing sleep over, after all, the human brain is not divided in watertight compartments which we can put our memories in, and thus our imagination can easily influence our recollection of the past, to the point that said recollection is no longer entirely accurate. For example, a historian would much rather base his or her research on any physical record of a specific event than on the personal retelling of said event made by a witness.

However, losing the ability to accurately describe events from the past is not what those who have voiced their concerns about the overuse of electronics to store information are worried about the most. In actuality, the most unfortunate consequence of a potential worsening of human memory would be the loss of resources to build and maintain a strong self-identity.

Of course, one is more likely to lose significant chunks of their memory by means of accident or illness, and claiming that an excessive use of electronics will inevitably lead to a collective crisis of identity would be blowing things out of proportion. But, at the same time, one can't help but wonder how this increasingly interconnected world will continue to sharpen our brains.



What mark for Communicative Achievement?

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Content: 3



What mark for Organisation?

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Content: 3

Communicative Achievement: 3



What mark for Language?

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Content: **3**

Organisation: **3**

Communicative Achievement: **3**



Sample answer

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Content: 3

Organisation: 3

Communicative Achievement: 3

Language: 3



Cambridge English: Proficiency Writing Part 1

Sample answer 2



Sample answer 2 – what's different?

Memory is a fundamental aspect of human existence, a core of our personality, the gist of identity. It makes us what we really are. Only when we lose it, begin we to appreciate it fully as many ageing or disabled persons could attest. A mere injury or disease can strike at the roots of our being and change our internal landscape, so to speak, making us virtually incapable of functioning in our previous or professional roles.

Is such a memory loss, however, truly detrimental to those who suffer from it? If less extensive, its consequences could be far less damaging. What is more, most of us experience memory problems on a daily basis, for example when we forget someone's name or face. What is more, by its very nature memory is selective and easily distorted by confabulation, making it an unsteady basis or a bad starting point in our quest for truth. The concept of witness, so crucial to the law and justice, is a good example of this problem. How could we judge other people when we cannot really know their deeds? How to determine if a given person has really committed a crime or caused a traffic accident? Here the ingenious devices come to aid – this is where possibly unbiased evidence can be found. Behind the eye of the camera, an electronic matrix stores the 'real' image of that happened. This is where, supposedly, the truth about particular incidents lies. Electronic data storage seems to be a solution for our memory problems.

However, here new problems arise. Not only are these contraptions prone to error, but they seem to impair our own memory. Suffice it to say, I do not remember as many telephone numbers as I did in the past before the invention of mobile phones. The people no longer pore over encyclopaedias or visit libraries to find that evades their memory. They learn it quickly – instantly – by browsing the internet but in the next minute they seem to forget what they have discovered or recalled.

To conclude, the electronic memory seems useful but its real role has to be confirmed in the future.



Sample answer 2 – what's different?

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A: Band 5 for all subscales

B: Band 5 for Content and Language; Band 4 for other subscales

C: Band 4 for all subscales



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Lexis

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Is such a memory loss, however, **truly detrimental** to those who suffer from it? If less extensive, its consequences could be far less damaging. What is more, most of us experience memory problems on a daily basis, for example when we forget someone's name or face. What is more, by its very nature memory is selective and easily distorted by confabulation, making it an unsteady basis or a bad starting point in our quest for truth. The concept of witness, so crucial to the law and justice, is a good example of this problem. How could we judge other people when we cannot really know their deeds? How to determine if a given person has really committed a crime or caused a traffic accident? Here the ingenious devices come to aid – this is where possibly unbiased evidence can be found. Behind the eye of the camera, an electronic matrix stores the 'real' image of that happened. This is where, supposedly, the truth about particular incidents lies. Electronic data storage seems to be a solution for our memory problems. However, here new problems arise. Not only are these contraptions prone to error, but they seem to impair our own memory. Suffice it to say, I do not remember as many telephone numbers as I did in the past before the invention of mobile phones. The people no longer pore over encyclopaedias or visit libraries to find that evades their memory. They learn it quickly – instantly – by browsing the internet but in the next minute they seem to forget what they have discovered or recalled.

To conclude, the electronic memory seems useful but its real role has to be confirmed in the future.

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Cambridge English: Proficiency Writing Part 1

Classroom activities



Classroom activities

- where to find input material to recreate the task type in the classroom
- how to improve specific language required:
 - summarising
 - reconstructing arguments
 - evaluating abstract arguments
 - integrating summaries into a coherent essay.
- how to improve academic writing skills.



Classroom ideas: dealing with input material

- use authentic texts, e.g. current affairs, news, letters to the editor, etc.
- learners choose a text; summarise key opinions; give reaction
- highlight key ideas
- pick a current affairs topic: learners research and discuss in class



Classroom ideas: improving language skills

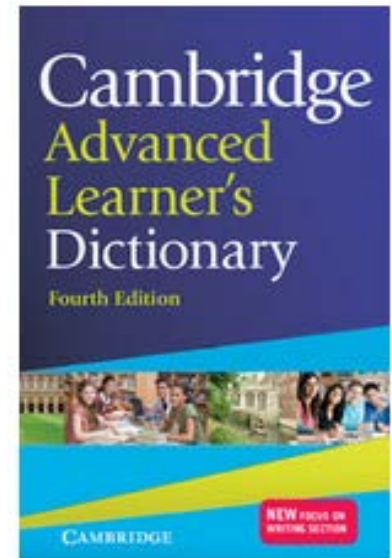
- summarising
- reconstructing arguments
- evaluating abstract arguments
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Classroom ideas: improving language skills

- brainstorming functional language
- focus on synonyms
- organisation:
 - re-order a sample answer
 - complete the missing linking devices





Classroom ideas: improving academic writing skills

What are academic writing skills?





Classroom ideas: improving academic writing skills

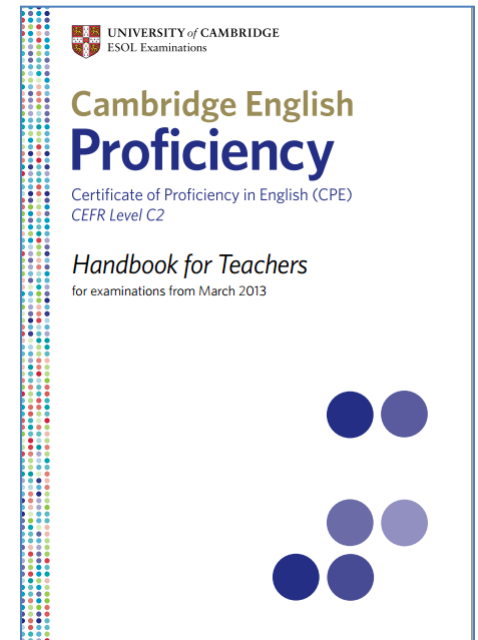
What are academic writing skills?:

- formal register
- clear language
- uses evidence or references
- may be in the third person
- introduction, main body, conclusion



Classroom ideas: improving academic writing skills

- *Cambridge English: Proficiency* Handbook for teachers
- Search online for ‘academic writing skills’
- Study model texts
- Evaluate sample answers





Summary of the session

- the purpose of Part 1 of the *Cambridge English: Proficiency* Writing test
- the skills assessed in Part 1 of the Writing test
- the assessment criteria and level descriptors for C2 level
- practical ideas for the classroom



Further information

The Cambridge English Scale Explained
26 and 28 January 2015

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Keep up to date with what's new via the
Cambridge English Language Assessment website:
www.cambridgeenglish.org

For information on Cambridge English webinars for teachers:
www.cambridgeenglish.org/webinars

