Cambridge English Qualifications

B1 Preliminary

Writing Checklist Lesson

Teacher's notes

Description

This lesson introduces students to a checklist which they can use when checking their own writing, as well as writing by other students. This is relevant to students preparing for exams, but can also be used for checking other writing they have done. Students are familiarised with the four aspects in the Cambridge English B1 Assessment Scale, which Cambridge English Language Assessment examiners use when they assess writing. They are also asked to check each other's work.

Aims of the lesson	▪ to introduce students to a checklist to use when checking their own writing ▪ to introduce students to the B1 Assessment Scale ▪ to give students practice in checking their own writing and other students' writing.
Time needed	75–90 minutes (or this lesson could be divided into two shorter lessons)
Materials required	▪ Checklist for writing B1 ▪ Student's Worksheets 1–4 (one copy of each worksheet per student) ▪ If possible, ask students to bring samples of writing they have done, for other students to check.

Procedure

1. Explain to students that they are going to look at a checklist of items which they can use to check their own writing, or other students' work. This is useful for checking writing in exams, but may also be useful for other writing.
2. Ask students if they have any samples of their own writing which they are happy to show to other students to check. If so, advise them they will look at them in the second part of the lesson.

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3. Divide students into pairs or small groups to discuss **Question 1** on **Student's Worksheet 1**. This asks students to talk about the writing for exams they have done before or are going to do, and how it is assessed.

Suggested key to Student's Worksheet 1
Question 1

Students may have done different types of exams. The items on the checklist in this lesson are the aspects assessed in the Cambridge B1 Assessment Scale; however, many other examination bodies use similar types of assessment criteria.

4. Now ask students to look at **Question 2**, which helps them to identify what is and what is not usually assessed. Ask them to cross out four items which are not usually assessed.

Key to Student's Worksheet 1
Question 2

The following items are unlikely to be directly assessed, and are not assessed in the Cambridge B1 Assessment Scale:
2. Is the handwriting easy to read?
6. Is all the information in the answer actually true?
7. How long does it take to read?
8. Does it make the reader want to laugh?

However, it is useful for students to think carefully about whether they are important. For example, students may mention any of the following ideas, all of which are useful to consider:

- Handwriting may not be formally assessed but illegible handwriting may be penalised.
- The length of time it takes to read something will not be assessed, but exam candidates should observe word limits.
- Writing does not have to make the reader laugh, but some writing tasks do require the candidate to write something interesting.

5. Now write the four aspects in the Cambridge Assessment B1 Scale on the board:

   Content
   Communicative Achievement
   Organisation
   Language.

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6. Ask students to discuss with each other for a few moments what these aspects mean, then ask them to look at **Question 3** (Student's Worksheet 1), and to match the aspects to their definitions.

Key to Student's Worksheet 1

Question 3

Content	focuses on how well the task has been completed; for example, has all the important information been included in the piece of writing?
Communicative Achievement	focuses on how appropriate the writing is; for example, is the text a story, a letter or an email and does it use the correct style of writing and appropriate functions, i.e. offering advice or apologising?
Organisation	focuses on the way the text is organised; for example, does the text have a logical sequence and some linking words to connect the sentences?
Language	focuses on vocabulary and grammar; for example, how accurate is the grammar and vocabulary in the text and is there a variety of language?

7. Now ask students to look at **Question 4**. They should look again at the list they saw in **Question 2**. Four items are crossed out. Ask them to match the remaining eight items to one of the aspects. Make sure that students realise that this is not a complete list of what is assessed within each aspect.

Key to Student's Worksheet 1
Question 4

1. Are there many grammar or spelling mistakes? **Language**
3. Is the writing well organised? **Organisation**
4. Has the student answered the question fully? **Content**
5. Does the writing achieve its purpose? **Communicative Achievement**
9. Are linking words used effectively? **Organisation**
10. Does the writing include extra information to provide more details? **Content**
11. Is formal or informal language used correctly? **Communicative Achievement**
12. Does the writer use interesting vocabulary? **Language**

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8. Tell students that they are going to talk about why these assessment criteria are used. Ask them why it is important, for example, to use a variety of vocabulary. Possible ideas may include the following:
   - A variety of vocabulary keeps the reader interested.
   - Using different words for the same thing shows that the writer has a good vocabulary.
   - Using similar words with slightly different meanings may help to describe small differences between things.

9. Now give out **Student's Worksheet 2** and ask them to do **Question 1**, which matches assessment items with the reasons why they are important.

Key to Student's Worksheet 2
Question 1
1. b
2. d
3. f
4. e
5. a
6. c

10. Now ask students to look at further ideas in **Question 2** and to discuss, with a partner, why they are important.

Suggested key to Student's Worksheet 2

Question 2

- Correct verb tenses are essential to understanding the relation of ideas in time.
- Punctuation is important for making sentence and paragraph structure clear.
- Logical organisation of ideas makes the writing much easier to read.

11. Ask students to look at **Question 3** and to talk about other things which might be important to check when they are writing. Give them **Student's Worksheet 3**, which has some items in each of the four aspects in a checklist. Students can add their own ideas about what they need to check in their own writing. Make sure that if they add their own ideas they put them in the correct boxes.
12. If you would like to divide this lesson into two, you can set step 13 for homework and complete the remaining activities in the next lesson.

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13. Give out **Student's Worksheet 4**, which provides some examples of actual students' answers to a B1 exam question from B1 Preliminary, also known as *Preliminary English Test (PET)*. Give the students some time to read through the question and answers. Then allow them to talk to each other about the strengths and weaknesses of each of the answers, focusing especially on the key areas of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.

Key to Student's Worksheet 4
Question 1

Examiner's Comments:

Answer 1

Content
All content is relevant to the task with appropriate expansion.
The target reader is fully informed.

Communicative Achievement
The target reader's attention is held throughout. The format is consistently appropriate to the task.

Organisation
The text is well organised and coherent, with a variety of linking words (*but; And; so*) and cohesive devices (*However; save the rest; although; Anyway*).

Language
A good range of everyday and some less common lexis (*a difficult decision to make; save the rest; take photos*) is used appropriately.
A range of simple and more complex grammatical forms is used with a good degree of control (*If I were you I would try to use some of the money; The camera could be a good idea*).
There are no errors.

Answer 2

Content
Although there is some irrelevance at the start when the candidate repeats the situation rather than offering advice, the task has been addressed. The target reader is informed.

Communicative Achievement
Straightforward ideas are communicated in generally appropriate ways.
The letter format is attempted.

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Organisation
The letter is connected and coherent.
Sentences tend to be short and are connected with a limited number of basic linking words (*or; and*) and cohesive devices (*That good new; With the money*).

Language
Everyday vocabulary is used appropriately.
Simple grammatical forms are used with reasonable control.
Several errors are present, but meaning can still be determined (*That good new; you can to buy; make fotos; tell me your decide*).

14. **Question 2** on **Student's Worksheet 4** focuses on asking students to look at each other's writing and giving feedback based on the assessment scale already seen. Some students may be reluctant to either share their own work or to comment on another student's writing. It is therefore very important that you emphasise the importance of students giving each other both sensitive and objective feedback. If students have not brought their own writing to class, you can ask them to write an answer to the exam question on **Student's Worksheet 4**.

15. Finally, ask students to discuss the questions in **Question 3**, which give students a chance to consider the best strategies for using the checklist in an exam.

Suggested key to Student's Worksheet 4
Question 3

- *Which one do you find easiest to check: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation or Language? Why?*

You should decide what is easy and difficult for you to check. You have to practise the things which you find most difficult.

- *When is the best time to check your work in an exam? During writing, or after you finish?*

It's very important to check once you have finished writing, but it's also worthwhile stopping as you are writing to make sure you are not making any mistakes. For example, while you are writing you can check that you have included everything which you have been asked to write about.

- *How can you remember what you have to check in the exam?*

Of course, you cannot take a checklist into the exam with you, but you can practise using the checklist when you do your own writing, and this will help you to get used to what you have to check.

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- *In an exam, how long should you spend checking at the end?*

It's important to leave plenty of time. For example, if your writing exam lasts 45 minutes, you should leave **at least five minutes** for checking.

- *Is it easier to see mistakes in your own writing or in another person's writing?*

Spotting your own mistakes is usually much harder than spotting mistakes in someone else's work. If you ask other students to find your mistakes, this should help you to become aware of the kind of mistakes you are likely to make.

16. For homework, you could ask students to write their own responses to the task on **Student's Worksheet 4** and bring them to the next lesson for checking in class. Alternatively, there are similar writing exercises from the B1 Preliminary exam on the Cambridge English website at: www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/preliminary/preparation

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Checklist for writing B1

- **Have you included all the necessary information in your text?**
- What do you have to include in your text?
- Why are you writing the text?
- Have you given enough details?

- **What style of text do you need to produce?**
- Is the text formal or informal?
- What do you have to write – a story, a letter, an email?
- Who are you writing to?
- Have you used language to recommend, offer advice, apologise or suggest?

- **Can your reader follow the text easily?**
- Have you used different linking words to connect the sentences?
- If you use 'he' or 'she' or 'it' to refer to something, is the reference clear to the reader?
- Are the ideas connected and presented in a logical sequence?
- Have you used punctuation correctly?

- **Will the reader be able to understand your work?**
- Have you checked the verb tenses in your text?
- Have you checked singular and plural nouns?
- Have you checked verb agreement with 3rd person verbs, i.e. 'she goes'?
- Have you checked for spelling mistakes?
- Is there any repeated vocabulary? Can any words be changed to improve the text?

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Student's Worksheet 1

Question 1

Talk to another student about writing exams you have done or are going to do.
What writing tasks did you do/are you going to have to do?
What do you know about how this writing is assessed?

Question 2

Look at the following list. Do you think these will be assessed when you do your next writing exam? There are four items which are **not** usually assessed. Find them and cross them out.

1. Are there many grammar or spelling mistakes?
2. Is the handwriting easy to read?
3. Is the writing well organised?
4. Has the student answered the question fully?
5. Does the writing achieve its purpose?
6. Is all the information in the answer actually true?
7. How long does it take to read?
8. Does it make the reader want to laugh?
9. Are linking words used effectively?
10. Does the writing include extra information to provide more details?
11. Is formal or informal language used correctly?
12. Does the writer use interesting vocabulary?

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Question 3

Now look at these descriptions of each assessment area. Can you match them with the areas? The first one is done for you.

Content	focuses on the way the text is organised; for example, does the text have a logical sequence and some linking words to connect the sentences?
Communicative Achievement	focuses on how appropriate the writing is; for example, is the text a story, a letter or an email and does it use the correct style of writing and appropriate functions, i.e. offering advice or apologising?
Organisation	focuses on vocabulary and grammar; for example, how accurate is the grammar and vocabulary in the text and is there a variety of language?
Language	focuses on how well the task has been completed; for example, has all the important information been included in the piece of writing?

Question 4

Now look again at the list of items in Question 2 which are assessed. Can you match them to the four assessment areas?

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Student's Worksheet 2

Question 1

Here are some questions from the checklist and some explanations about why it is important to check these aspects of your writing. Match the question with the correct explanation. The first one is done for you.

1. Have you used the correct pronouns? ***(Language)***	*a. Giving details provides the reader with extra information so that they are fully informed.*
2. Why are you writing the text? ***(Communicative Achievement)***	*b. If the person (he, she, it, they) changes, it is no longer clear who or what is being discussed.*
3. Who are you writing to? ***(Communicative Achievement)***	*c. Sentences linked (with because, however, but, and) show the connection between the ideas.*
4. Is there any repeated vocabulary? ***(Language)***	*d. The reason for writing should be clear to the reader and this provides a focus to your writing.*
5. Have you given enough information? ***(Content)***	*e. Trying to use a variety of vocabulary makes the text less repetitive and has a better effect.*
6. Have you used different linking words? ***(Organisation)***	*f. If the reader is a teacher or a friend, you will use a different tone and suitable vocabulary.*

Question 2

Now look at these questions which you can ask yourself when checking writing. Talk to another student about why these are important:

- Are the verbs in the correct tenses? **(Language)**
- Is the punctuation correct? **(Organisation)**
- Are the ideas in a logical order? **(Organisation)**

Question 3

Now think of other things which are important when you write. Talk to another student about why they are important. Do you think these are assessed under Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation or Language?

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Student's Worksheet 3

Now create your own checklist – highlight or underline the things which you think are most important for you. You can add other things which are especially important to each of the boxes. When you have finished, compare your checklist with another student.

Communicative Achievement	**Content**
• Is it clear why you are writing the text? • Is it clear who you are writing to? • Do you use the correct style of writing? • Do you use formal or informal language correctly? • If you are writing a letter, do you use appropriate opening and closing text? *Add your own ideas about things to check:*	• Do you give enough information? • Is all the important information included in the piece of writing? • Do you answer the question fully? *Add your own ideas about things to check:*

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Organisation	**Language**
• Have you used different linking words? • Are the ideas in a logical order? • Is the punctuation correct? *Add your own ideas about things to check:*	• Do you use interesting vocabulary? • Are the verbs in the correct tenses? • Is there any repeated vocabulary? • Have you used the correct pronouns? *Add your own ideas about things to check:*

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Students' Worksheet 4

Question 1

Now read an exam question, and look at two candidates' answers. Talk to another student about the answers, and decide if they would score high marks for Content, Organisation, Communicative Achievement and Language.

This is part of a letter you receive from an English friend:

My grandmother has given me some money. There's enough to buy a really good camera or go on holiday with my friends. My parents want me to save the money. What do you think I should do?

Now write a letter, giving your friend some advice.
Write about 100 words.

Answer 1

Dear Martin,

That's great! Your grandmother is very kind and nice.

However, I can see you have a difficult decision to make. If I were you I would try to use some of the money for the holiday and save the rest (although I don't know how much you have or how much the holiday costs). What do you think? The camera could be a good idea, but how often do you use a camera? And you can ask your friends to take photos on the holiday so you still have some!

Anyway, write to me and tell me what you do.

Love Martina.

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Answer 2

Hellow Cris,

That good new! Your grandmother is good. With the money you can to buy a camera or may be go holidays. May be you can visit me! You can to save money to, good idea! What your parents think? I think yes camera good idea you can make fotos and send me.

Have nice time and tell me your decide what you do.

I wait your answer.

Kiss Ana

Question 2

Now show your own writing to other students in your class, and look at each other's writing. Tell each other if you think the writing would get good marks for Content, Communicative Achievement, Language and Organisation.

Question 3

Discuss the following with another student:

- Which one do you find easiest to check: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation or Language? Why?
- When is the best time to check your work in an exam? During writing, or after you finish?
- How can you remember what you have to check in the exam?
- In an exam, how long should you spend checking at the end?
- Is it easier to see mistakes in your own writing or in another person's writing?

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