

B2 First for Schools Writing Checklist Lesson

Teacher's notes

Description

This lesson introduces learners to a checklist which they can use when checking their own writing, as well as writing by other students. This is relevant to learners 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 B2 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to introduce students to a checklist to use when checking their own writing ▪ to introduce students to the B2 Assessment Scale ▪ to give students practice in checking their own writing and other students' writing.
Time needed	<p>75–90 minutes (or this lesson could be divided into two shorter lessons)</p>
Materials required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Checklist for writing B2 ▪ 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.

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 come from the Cambridge B2 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 probably not 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 B2 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 B2 Scale on the board:

Content
Communicative Achievement
Organisation
Language.

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 in terms of genre; for example, what sort of text do you have to produce – a letter, a report, a review, an essay? Each one requires a different format and has a different function.
Organisation	focuses on the way the text is organised; for example, is the information presented coherently and are the ideas connected with cohesive devices or linking words?
Language	focuses on vocabulary and grammar; for example, how accurate is the text and is there a range of complex and simple structures and vocabulary?

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 10 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**
13. Does the writer use complex structures, such as *I had been looking*?
Language
14. Does the writer use referencing words like *these, those* and *that* effectively? **Organisation**

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

- Sequencing words are important when structuring longer, more complex texts, which students at B2 may have to write.
- At B2, students may have to write a variety of texts with different purposes, so functional language such as recommending or explaining may be important.
- When writing letters, appropriate opening and closing text is important for having the correct effect on the reader.

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 should 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.
13. Give out **Student's Worksheet 4**, which provides some examples of actual candidates' answers to two B2 exam questions from *B2 First*. Give the students some time to read through the questions and answers. Then allow them to talk to each other about the strengths and weaknesses of each of the answers to the two questions, focusing especially on the key areas of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.

Key to Student's Worksheet 4

Question 1

Examiner's Comments:

Content

- All content is relevant and the target reader is fully informed.
- The candidate responds to the questions that have been asked and gives details about the places David's friends can visit (*Baltic Sea; museum of our local history*).
- The email explains that the best mode of transport is bike (*because of small distances between the places and views are amazing*).

Communicative Achievement

- The conventions of the task are used to hold the reader's attention. The response is written in an informal, friendly but polite tone, which is appropriate for the task. The conventions for opening and closing an email of this type are used appropriately, as well as standard phrases for communication to a friend (*You wrote that; What do you think about it; I look forward to hearing from you soon; Best wishes*).
- Straightforward ideas are communicated. Information and advice are given and the overall tone is enthusiastic and positive.

Organisation

- The text is well organised and coherent and uses the input email well to structure the response (*I'm glad your friends are visiting; I have many ideas; In my opinion; My area includes also; which many; Your friends could; You wrote that; That's great*).
- A variety of linking words (*because of*) and cohesive devices, such as substitution and referencing, are used across some sentences and to connect simple ideas.

Language

- There is a range of everyday vocabulary used which is relevant to the topic (*beautiful Baltic Sea; many tourist visit; in this season; Tickets are not so expensive*).
- There is a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms used with a good degree of control, e.g. modals, present and past forms of verbs.
- There are some errors (*My area includes also; send me some your ideas*) and some spelling mistakes (*sunbath; memorise; intrested*) but these do not impede communication.

Question 2**Examiner's Comments:****Content**

- All content is relevant to the task. However, the target reader is on the whole informed, rather than being fully informed.
- Both numbered points (transport; rivers and seas) are referred to with some discussion of the problems caused (*harmful exhaust; factories ... pour off their waste to ponds*) and some limited mention of solutions.
- No tangible third aspect of environmental damage is discussed.
- While the writer does conclude with a strong statement of opinion (*every person can and must*) the reader is not fully informed on the solutions proposed (*Doing a little steps for protection our environment every day we will be able to save our Earth*).

Communicative Achievement

- The essay is written in a consistently neutral register and the format is appropriate for the communicative task, using more formal language to introduce the ideas within the text (*To begin with; First of all; It's a fact of common knowledge*).
- There is a clear essay structure with an opening statement, topic paragraphs and a conclusion which sums up the writer's point of view.
- Straightforward ideas are communicated to the target reader but when more complex ideas are attempted these are sometimes not as successful (*Obviously that cleaning manufacturing water helps to avoid extinction of ocean residents*).

Organisation

- The text is generally well organised and coherent using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices, particularly to introduce the ideas throughout the text (*To begin with; In addition to this; Needless to say; Apart from this*).
- The essay is clearly organised into paragraphs, which each deal with one idea. Occasionally the follow-up examples are not as clearly connected as they could be. For example, they discuss how factories pollute pond water and then offer a solution which would help *ocean residents*.

Language

- There is a range of everyday vocabulary used appropriately with some attempt to use more sophisticated lexis (*a global ecocatastrophe; atmosphere; common knowledge; factories and plants; inclined to believe; must contribute to solving*).
- There is a range of simple and some more complex grammatical forms used, and although there are errors, these do not impede communication.

14. **Question 3** on **Student's Worksheet 4** focuses on asking students to look at each other's writing and giving feedback based on the assessment scales 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 one of the exam questions on **Student's Worksheet 4**.
15. Finally, ask students to discuss the questions in **Question 4**, which allow them to consider the best strategies for using the checklist in an exam.

Suggested key to Student's Worksheet 4
Question 4

- *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.

- *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 one of the tasks on **Student's Worksheet 4** and bring them to the next lesson for checking in class. Alternatively, there are similar writing exercises from the B2 First exam on the Cambridge English website at: www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/first/preparation

Checklist for writing B2

- **Have you included all the essential information in your text?**
 - What do you need to include and how much detail do you need to give?
 - Why are you writing the text and what do you hope to achieve?
 - Have you focused on the topic and the specific questions?

- **What style of text do you need to produce?**
 - What are the style conventions of the text you have to write?
 - Do you need to use a formal, neutral or informal tone?
 - Can you include personal opinions or should you be objective?
 - Who are you writing the text for and what are their expectations?

- **Have you organised your ideas in a logical way?**
 - Do the ideas develop logically so the reader can follow your ideas or argument?
 - Have you used cohesive devices to connect ideas across sentences and paragraphs?
 - Have you used appropriate linking words for the genre of text?

- **Have you used a range of language correctly?**
 - Which tenses and language structures are appropriate to communicate your ideas?
 - Whose voice are you using – ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘we’? Is this consistent and accurate in your text?
 - Do the verbs agree with plural, singular, countable and uncountable nouns?
 - Have you used topic-specific vocabulary to describe and explain in more detail?
 - Does any vocabulary appear in your text frequently? Can you use any other words?

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?
13. Does the writer use complex structures, such as *I had been looking*?
14. Does the writer use referencing words like *these*, *those* and *that* effectively?

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, is the information presented coherently and are the ideas connected with cohesive devices or linking words?
- Communicative Achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is in terms of genre; for example, what sort of text do you have to produce – a letter, a report, a review, an essay? Each one requires a different format and has a different function.
- Organisation** focuses on vocabulary and grammar; for example, how accurate is the text and is there a range of complex and simple structures and vocabulary?
- 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?

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. <i>Whose voice are you using (I, you, we, etc.)?</i> | a. <i>The reader needs to have enough information to be able to completely understand your ideas.</i> |
| 2. <i>What do you hope to achieve from your text?</i> | b. <i>The reader should know whose views, ideas or opinions are being represented in the text.</i> |
| 3. <i>Can you include personal opinions?</i> | c. <i>The text should introduce one idea at a time and find a link to move on to the next idea.</i> |
| 4. <i>Have you used topic-specific vocabulary?</i> | d. <i>Some texts have an aim which requires the reader to use the information in some way.</i> |
| 5. <i>How much detail do you need to give?</i> | e. <i>Using vocabulary which is directly related to the subject makes your text more focused.</i> |
| 6. <i>Do your ideas develop logically?</i> | f. <i>Depending on the genre, some texts require a factual approach rather than a personal view.</i> |

Question 2

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

- Using sequencing words: *firstly, secondly*.
- Using functional language, recommending, explaining.
- Using the correct opening in a letter.

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?

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • If necessary, do you use appropriate functional language, i.e. offering advice or apologising? • If you are writing a letter, do you use appropriate opening and closing text? <p><i>Add your own ideas about things to check:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you give enough information? • Is all the important information included in the piece of writing? • Do you answer the question fully? • If appropriate, do you include personal opinions? <p><i>Add your own ideas about things to check:</i></p>

Organisation

- Are the ideas in a logical order?
- If appropriate, have you used sequencing words: *firstly*, *secondly*?
- Have you used referencing words like *these*, *those* and *that* effectively?

Add your own ideas about things to check:

Language

- *Do you use interesting vocabulary and topic-specific vocabulary?*
- *Is there any repeated vocabulary?*
- *Have you used complex structures, such as *I had been looking?**

Add your own ideas about things to check:

Student's Worksheet 4

Question 1

Now read an exam question, and look at one candidate's answer. Talk to another student about the answer, and decide if it would score high marks for Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.

You have received this email from your English-speaking friend David.

From: David
Subject: touring holiday

Some college friends of mine are visiting your area soon for a week's touring holiday. They would like to travel around and learn about your local area and its history.

Can you tell me about some of the places they could visit? What's the best way to travel around – car, bike or coach?

Thanks,

David

Write your **email**.

Dear David,

I'm glad your friends are visiting my area soon for a week's touring holiday. I have many ideas what I can show them and tell about.

In my opinion the best way to travel around will be by bike because of small distances between the places and views are amazing.

My area includes also beautiful Baltic Sea which many tourist visit especially in summer. Your friends could sunbath or swim if they would like but the water is quite cold in this season. Beautiful sightseeing of sunrise is the best memorise!

You wrote that they are intrested in history of my local area. That's great! We have museum of our local history where I can go with them. Tickets are not so expensive and I can think about some discount.

What do you think about it? Would you mind send me some your ideas?

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,

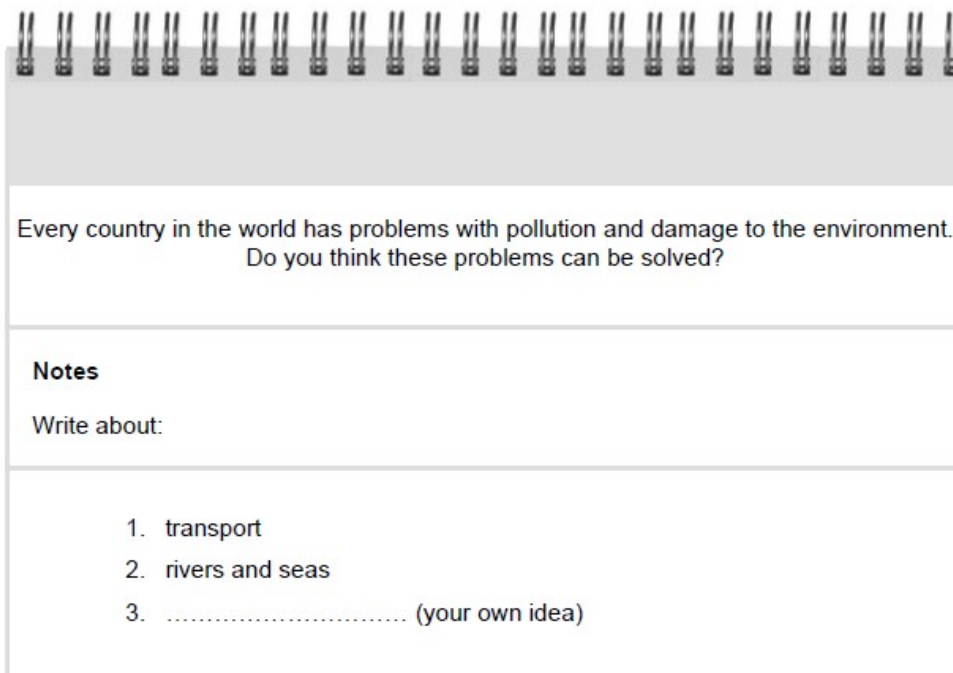
Sam

Question 2

Now read this exam question, and look at the candidate's answer. Talk to another student about the answer, and decide if it would score high marks for Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language.

In your English class you have been talking about the environment. Now, your English teacher has asked you to write an essay.

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



Every country in the world has problems with pollution and damage to the environment. Do you think these problems can be solved?

Notes

Write about:

1. transport
2. rivers and seas
3. (your own idea)

To begin with pollution and damage to the environment is the most serious and difficult problem for countries of all over the world. Scientists of different countries predict a global ecocatastrophe if people won't change their attitude to our planet.

First of all a huge damage to the environment brings a transport. People can't imagine their living without cars, buses, trains, ships and planes. But it's an open secret that one of disadvantage of these accustomed things is harmful exhaust. Needless to say that use of environment friendly engines helps us to save atmosphere from pollution.

In addition to this our rivers and seas are in not less danger situation. It's a fact of common knowledge that numerous factories and plants pour off their waste to ponds. Obviously that cleaning manufacturing water helps to avoid extinction of ocean residents.

Apart from this I'm inclined to believe that every person can and must contribute to solving this important problem. Doing a little steps for protection our environment every day we will be able to save our Earth. And it's a task of each of us.

Question 3

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 4

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?