

Level B1 Writing Checklist – 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 examiners use when they assess writing. They are also asked to check each other’s work.

Time required: 75–90 minutes (or two shorter lessons)

Materials required:

- Checklist for Writing B1
- Student handouts 1–4 (one copy of each per student)
- If possible, ask students to bring samples of writing they have done, for other students to check.

Aims:

- to introduce students to a checklist to use when checking their own writing
- to introduce students to the B1 Writing Assessment Scale
- to give students practice in checking their own writing and other students’ writing

Procedure

1. Explain to students that they are going to look at a checklist which they can use to review 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 handout 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.
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 aspects which are not usually assessed.
5. Now write the four criteria in the Cambridge Assessment B1 Writing scale on the board:

Content

Communicative Achievement

Organisation

Language

6. Ask students to discuss with each other what these criteria mean, then ask them to look at Question 3 (**Student handout 1**), and to match the criteria to their definitions.
7. Now ask students to look at Question 4. They should look again at the list they saw in Question 2 where four items are crossed out. Ask them to match the remaining eight items to one of the criteria. Make sure that students realise that this is not a complete list of what is assessed within each criterion.
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 appropriate 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 range of vocabulary and also shows an ability to organise their answer coherently.
9. Now give out **Student handout 2** and ask them to do Question 1, which matches assessment items with the reasons why they are important.
10. Now ask students to look at further ideas in Question 2 and to discuss, with a partner, why they are important.
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 handout 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.
13. Give out **Student handout 4**, which provides some examples of actual students' answers to a B1 exam question from B1 Preliminary for Schools. Give 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.
14. Question 2 on **Student handout 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 handout 4**, or you could have a prepared sample for them to look at.

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.
16. For homework, you could ask students to write their own responses to the task on **Student handout 4** and bring them to the next lesson for checking in class.

Answer key

Student handout 1

Question 1 (suggested answers)

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.

Question 2

The following aspects are unlikely to be directly assessed, and are not stated assessment criteria in the Cambridge B1 Writing 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 if it affects how well the target reader is informed.
- 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.

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 an email, an article or a story, and does it use the correct style of writing and appropriate functions such as offering advice or apologising?
Organisation	Focuses on the way the text is organised. For example, does the text have a logical sequence and ways of connecting the sentences?
Language	Focuses on vocabulary and grammar. For example, how accurate and/or relevant is the grammar and vocabulary in the text and is there a variety of language?

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 all information required by the target reader? **Content**
11. Is formal or informal language used correctly? **Communicative Achievement**
12. Does the writer use appropriate vocabulary? **Language**

Student handout 2

Question 1

1. b
2. d
3. f
4. e
5. a
6. c

Question 2 (suggested answers)

- 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.

Student handout 4

Question 1

Examiner's Comments:

Candidate A

Content **Mark: 5**

All content is relevant to the task.

The target reader is fully informed about all the points in the task. The first point has been addressed, although the word *nervous* has been used incorrectly for this context. However, the rest of the email is positively phrased, so this can be seen as a slip. There is a preference expressed, (the class), and suggestions are given regarding activities, *play with the blackboard, and food, pizza, fries; chocolate, sweets.*

Communicative Achievement

Mark: 3

The conventions of an email, such as a friendly, polite tone, and a consistent register, are used in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas: *I think that; About the food; I'm sure the party is going to be very well; See you soon.* There is no opening salutation, but it is clearly directed towards Mrs Lake and the information is presented in a suitable format for a teacher to read.

Organisation

Mark: 3

The text is connected and coherent. Paragraphs are used to good effect, each focusing on one aspect. The text is connected using linking words and some cohesive devices, such as referencing: *this party; because in this way; About the food; and for the sweet people.*

Language

Mark: 3

Everyday vocabulary, suitable for the topic, is used generally appropriately: *the best place; together; blackboard; pizza; fries; chocolate; sweets; good time.* The use of *nervous* in the first sentence is slightly distracting as it does not convey the correct emotion.

Simple grammatical forms are used with a good degree of control: *I think that the best place to do the party; we can be all together; listen to music; something like this; is going to be; we are going to have a very good time.*

Errors are noticeable but meaning can still be determined: *I am very nervous for; and for the sweet people; to be very well.*

Candidate B

Content

Mark: 5

All content is relevant to the task.

The target reader is fully informed about all the points in the task. There is a direct response to the first point, *I think it's a great idea*, and a clear preference is expressed for where the party should be held, in the classroom. Suggestions are made about the activities, *some games like domino*, and what food to bring, *pizza; coca-cola; potatoes; cake.*

Communicative achievement

Mark: 5

The conventions of an email, such as a friendly, enthusiastic tone, a consistent register, as well as appropriate opening and closing salutations, are used to hold the target reader's attention and to communicate straightforward ideas in response to the initial input text, *Dear Mrs Lake; If you want; Do you like the idea? See you.* Suggestions are made and supported with reasons to explain the decision taken, *I prefer to do the party at school ... because we've spend a lot of time there.*

Organisation

Mark: 4

The text is generally well organised and coherent. Although there is only one paragraph, the text is connected through the use of a variety of linking words and cohesive devices, particularly referencing, which makes the text flow very naturally, *a party; the party; at school, in the classroom, because; there, and I think it would be better; so that; the good things that; this year; like; one of us; also; other students.*

Language

Mark: 4

A range of everyday vocabulary, suitable for the topic, is used appropriately, *remember; all the good things; special; bring some games; together; pizza.*

A range of simple and some more complex grammatical forms is used with a good degree of control, *we've spend a lot of time there; I think it would be better; that have made this year so special; I think we could bring ... or one of us can bring; If you want, I will buy; the girls will make a cake.*

There are one or two errors, but they do not impede communication, *we've spend; one of us can bring his Play Station.*

Student handout 4

Question 3

- a. **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.
- b. **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 and that you are not repeating yourself. You can also look at how much time and words you have devoted to each point.
- c. **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.
- d. **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.
- e. **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 and make you a better communicator.

Student handout 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 B1 Preliminary for schools Writing is assessed?

Question 2

Look at the following list. Do you think these aspects will be assessed when you do your next writing exam? There are four aspects 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 all information required by the target reader?
11. Is formal or informal language used correctly?
12. Does the writer use appropriate vocabulary?

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 organized. For example, does the text have a logical sequence and ways of connecting the sentences?
Communicative Achievement	Focuses on how appropriate the writing is. For example, is the text an email, an article or a story, and does it use the correct style of writing and appropriate functions such as offering advice or apologising?
Organisation	focuses on vocabulary and grammar; for example, how accurate and/or relevant 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?

Student handout 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. If the pronoun (he, she, it, they) changes, it is no longer clear who or what is being discussed. |
| 2. Why are you writing the text?
(Communicative Achievement) | b. Giving details provides the reader with extra information so that they are fully informed. |
| 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?

Student handout 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.

<p>Communicative Achievement</p> <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? • Do you use formal or informal language correctly? • 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>	<p>Content</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? <p><i>Add your own ideas about things to check:</i></p>
<p>Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you used different linking words? • Are the ideas in a logical order? • Is the punctuation correct? <p><i>Add your own ideas about things to check:</i></p>	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you use appropriate vocabulary? • Are the verbs in the correct tenses? • Is there any repeated vocabulary? • Have you used the correct pronouns? <p><i>Add your own ideas about things to check:</i></p>

Student handout 4

Question 1

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

EMAIL

From: Mrs Lake

Subject: End of year party

Dear Class,

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

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

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

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

Reply soon!

Anna Lake

Great!

Explain

Suggest ...

Tell Mrs Lake

Write your email to Mrs Lake using all the notes.

Sample Answers

Candidate A

I'm very nervous for this party, to celebrate the end of the school year.

I think that the best place to do the party is the class, because in this way we can be all together. In the class we can do a lot of activities like play with the blackboard, or watch a film, or listen to music. About the food, we can have pizza, fries and for the sweet people chocolate, sweets or something like this. I'm sure the party is going to be very well, and we are going to have a very good time.

See you soon!

Candidate B

Dear Mrs Lake,

I think it's a great idea to have a party to celebrate the end of the school year. I prefer to do the party at school, in the classroom, because we've spend a lot of time there, and I think it would be better, so that we can remember all the good things that have made this year so special. I think we could bring some games like domino, or one of us can bring his Play Station and we can play together. If you want, I will buy some pizza, and also something to drink like coca-cola or water. The other students will bring some potatoes, and the girls will make a cake. Do you like the idea?

See you!

Question 2

Now show your own writing to other students in your class or look at the sample answer prepared by your teacher. Tell each other what you think in terms of 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?

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 – an email, an article or a story?
 - Who are you writing to?
 - Have you used appropriate language?

- Can your reader follow the text easily?
 - Have you used different ways of connecting 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?