

Cambridge

English Skills Test

General

Sample candidate responses and commentaries CEFR levels A1 to C1



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English

Introduction

This set of candidate responses represents performances at different levels of the CEFR from A1 to C1. The responses and accompanying commentaries are intended to help teachers and learners understand the features of these examples of writing which contribute to the text being at a particular CEFR level. As you read through, you may also wish to refer to the EST General Writing Assessment Criteria.

Part 1

Writing an email: sample email task

Part 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

You have received this email from a friend who you went to college with.

Do you know it will soon be five years since we finished college? I think we should contact our old friends and arrange to meet again. Have you got any ideas about what we could do to celebrate and when?

Write and tell me.

Jan

Write an **email** to Jan:

- suggest a good way to celebrate with your old college friends
- explain when the best time for the celebration would be
- offer to help organise the celebration.

Try to write **100–200** words.

Email task: sample responses and commentaries

A1 candidate response

Hi,

i like we meet soon for example next mounth we celebrate in queen pub and we meet every Saturday before five years.

Giovanna

Commentary

The CEFR states that at A1 level, writers can compose a short, very simple message to friends to give them a piece of information or to ask them a question.

The writer here has communicated basic concrete information in a simple way, using simple words and basic expressions (e.g. *i like we meet soon*), although some parts of the message are not communicated successfully (*we meet every Saturday before five years*).

The writer links words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors (e.g. *and*). There is mother tongue influence in some syntactic structures (*before five years*). There is limited punctuation (e.g. *i like we meet soon for example next mounth we celebrate in queen pub*); this is the main issue with the organisation of the text, and, as a result, the text is difficult to follow. Errors impede meaning and result in the text not reading as a connected whole; the text lacks cohesion, such as in '*we celebrate in queen pub and we meet every Saturday before five years*', where the relative pronoun '*where*' (to refer back to '*the college*') is not available yet in the writer's language resource and has been replaced with '*and*'.

The writer's attempt to communicate the intended ideas is not always successful and the reader needs to read slowly to try to interpret the text at times; this is because the writer produces a few simple grammatical forms with only limited control. Tenses are not mastered yet, only the simple present and base forms are available (e.g. *like; meet; celebrate*), and the writer lacks the necessary language resource to be able to add clarity to the intended message. The linguistic range is a very basic one of simple words and phrases (e.g. *meet; mounth; years*), with higher level words like '*celebrate*' being lifted from the prompt.

A2 candidate response

Hi Jan,

I hop ethis email is finding you well.

we can go to the cinema and celebrate

At the weekend would be better for me.

I can help you with preparation if you want.

I can come around at around 12 tomorrow to discuss the details

Sophie

Commentary

The CEFR states that at A2 level, writers can write simple personal correspondence and can exchange information in short letters responding to questions from the other person.

The writer has produced an email with an engaging tone which communicates simple ideas accurately, showing awareness of the conventions of a message, for example, when they greet the recipient at the start of their message (*Hi Jan, I hop ethis email is finding you well*).

Simple grammatical forms are used with good control to make suggestions and offers (*we can go to the cinema and celebrate; I can help you with preparation if you want; I can come around*). There are few errors overall – one, possibly typographical, spelling error (*hop ethis*), an incorrect choice of verb aspect (*is finding you well*), and two correct sentences missing full stops. Everyday vocabulary is used accurately and appropriately (*go to the cinema; the weekend; discuss the details*).

In terms of organisation of the text, the email is clear and coherent: the ideas contained in each sentence follow a logical sequence. However, as a whole, the response reads more like a collection of individual sentences rather than a cohesive text. No cohesive devices are used to knit the sentences together, which results in a slightly negative effect on the reader. It is possible that this effect comes from the writer having answered each bullet point of the input in isolation rather than as a series of related points that together form a text.

B1 candidate response

Hi Jan

how are you? I am fine and so my family.

I am very to read your proposal, sure I can help you.

I think that the best period for meeting can be in november in the 1 first week of the month. In my opinion we can meet in A tawn during the festival. I know a good location there. Anyway I prefer to mmet you for organize the meet: Can I phone you tomorrow?

Bye

Fani

Commentary

The CEFR states that at B1 level, writers can compose emails asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point they feel to be important. The writer has produced an email that demonstrates the ability to do this.

The writer has produced an email in a suitable tone, which is consistent throughout. They have shown awareness of the conventional structure of the text type and have made a good attempt at opening and closing the email in a suitably friendly way (*how are you?; I am fine; Anyway I ...; Can I phone you tomorrow?*). In terms of organisation of the text, the email is connected and coherent. A limited number of cohesive devices are used to refer back to earlier in the text (*there*) and signal a change of focus (*Anyway*).

Simple grammatical forms are used with a good degree of control to make suggestions, express opinions (*I think that the best period for meeting; we can meet in ... during; I know a good location; I prefer to*) and make simple offers (*sure I can help you*). The errors, which include omissions (*and so my family; I am very to read your proposal*), do not prevent the meaning from being communicated.

The writer has sufficient vocabulary to express themselves in simple terms. The everyday vocabulary is mostly appropriate for the task and sufficient for the writer to get their message across (*fine; best period; good location; organize*). There are a couple of spelling errors (*tawn; mmet*), although meaning can still be determined. 'Proposal' is rather formal in this context, but it doesn't distract from the message.

B2 candidate response

Dear Jan,

it's such a pleasure to hear from you!

I can't believe how time flies ... five years since the last time we partied together.

We should definitely celebrate our anniversary with all the old friends,

Why don't you all come over to Italy and spend a week in my town?

We should organise it this summer, so that we could be more free from work and enjoy Senigallia's beach.

If you want I can contact all the other college mates on Facebook and create an event page there ... does it sound ok for you?

Let me know!

Big hug

Marianna

Commentary

The CEFR states that at B2 level, writers can write letters/emails which convey degrees of emotion and highlight the personal significance of events and experiences, and comment on the correspondent's news and views. The writer here has written a clear, succinct email which demonstrates these abilities.

The writer has employed the conventions and register of personal correspondence. They use appropriately informal language, fixed phrases and idioms effectively to create a friendly, positive tone and to show they can maintain a relationship through personal correspondence and relate their experiences to those of the correspondent (e.g. *it's such a pleasure to hear from you!*; *I can't believe how time flies ... five years since the last time we partied together*). They use the language fluently and effectively to pose sympathetic questions and follow up on issues of mutual interest (e.g. *does it sound ok for you?*; *Let me know!*). The writer uses all these means to successfully hold the target reader's attention.

In terms of organisation, the ideas are presented in a straightforward way and the text is clear throughout. Cohesion is achieved through the use of pronouns that refer back to previously discussed suggestions (*organise it*), and synonyms (*the old friends*; *the other college mates*).

A range of fairly simple structures is used with a good degree of control to make suggestions (*Why*

don't you all come over to Italy; we should ... so that we could) and offers (*If you want I can contact; does it sound ok for you?*). There are a few minor inaccuracies and some slightly awkward phrasing (*We should organise it [for] this summer, so that we could be more free from work*), but meaning can still be determined. Vocabulary relating to relationships and reunions is used appropriately in most instances (*partied; anniversary; contact; event page*), although 'college mates' might be better phrased as 'classmates'. There are no significant issues with spelling or punctuation, with just one misspelling present (*definetly*) and the use of a comma instead of a full stop, which is likely to have been a slip.

C1 candidate response

Hi Jan,

So nice to hear from you! How are you doing?

It would be great to meet and celebrate with our friends from college. How about meeting in London sometimes next month? We could meet in a pub, have dinner, and then go to a club, like in the old days?

I think that Saturday 20th would work best for everyone: I know that Ruth is on holiday next week-end, and I will be away the following one (on a business trip to Japan, I will tell you more about it when we meet!). If I remember well, you are busy the week-end of the 27th, as you are attending your sister-in-law's wedding, aren't you? Taking all that into account, Saturday 20th looks like the best option. We would have to ask Sean, Mary and Alex if they are available though.

If you want, I could send an email to everyone, to check that we are all free on Saturday 20th, and suggest that we meet in London. I'll tell them about my idea of going to a pub and then to a club, but maybe someone will come up with a better suggestion (Mary always has great ideas!). Then we can talk about hotel bookings, as most of us will have to stay the night, I guess.

I am really looking forward to it, thanks a lot for suggesting it!

See you soon,

Camille

Commentary

The CEFR states that at C1 level, writers have the ability to express themselves with clarity and precision in personal correspondence, using language flexibly and effectively, including emotional usage. The text produced here provides evidence that the writer has those abilities; they have produced an email with a very engaging tone, notable for the ease with which the ideas are

conveyed.

The writer has successfully employed the conventions and informal register of personal correspondence. They use a level of formality and conventions appropriate to the context to show they can maintain a relationship through personal correspondence and relate their experiences to those of the correspondent (e.g. *like in the old days?*; *I know that Ruth is on holiday next week-end, and I will be away the following one*; *We would have to ask Sean, Mary and Alex if they are available though*). They use a range of natural, accurate and appropriately colloquial language very effectively to engage the reader and create a friendly tone and add a personal touch (*So nice to hear from you!*; *If I remember well, you are ... aren't you?*; *Mary always has great ideas!*). The email is likely to have a very positive effect on the target reader.

The text is organised in a sophisticated way, through the use of cohesive devices such as substitution (*Ruth is on holiday next week-end, and I will be away the following one*), and phrases that signpost the current stage of the discussion and the degree of shared knowledge between the reader and writer (*Taking all that into account, Saturday 20th looks like the best option*; *Then we can talk about hotel bookings, as most of us will have to stay the night, I guess*).

Throughout the text, the writer demonstrates full control of the grammar they have used – for example, to refer to future events (*If I remember well, you are busy the week-end of the 27th*; *I will tell you more about it when we meet*; *as you are attending your sister-in-law's wedding*). A wide variety of structures has been used with flexibility and accuracy to make suggestions (*How about meeting ...*; *we could meet ...*; *I think that Saturday 20th would work best for everyone*; *Saturday 20th looks like the best option*) and offers to help (*If you want, I could send ...*; *Then we can talk about hotel bookings ...*). Vocabulary is used appropriately and accurately and there are some good examples of collocations (*on a business trip to Japan*; *come up with a [better] suggestion*). There are no issues with spelling or punctuation.

Part 2

Writing for a wider audience: sample task

Part 2

You should spend about 25 minutes on this task.

The town where you live has a website where local people can discuss local issues. You are concerned about the increase in car and truck traffic in the town and have decided to post your comments on the town website.

Write your comments for the town website.

Write about:

- why you think the amount of traffic is increasing in your town
- what problems the increased traffic is causing in your town
- how the amount of traffic in your town could be reduced.

You can also include any other points you think are important.

Try to write **100–250** words.

Writing for a wider audience: sample responses and commentaries

A1 candidate response

I drive a car for work every day. I boring problem traffic so much. the amount of traffic increasing more last year. becuase last year i spend time drive a car for work 45 minute but on nowday I spend time 1 hour 30 minute. the people like buy a new car and they are love show high socail. somebody like keep old car. that both people style increase problems traffic. if the goverment want to reduce amount of traffice ... prepare a new choice to travel example the increase a bus however we are have problem. why the people like travel by car.

Commentary

The CEFR states that at A1 level, writers can produce simple isolated phrases and sentences.

The writing lacks the quality of a text, because the writer produces isolated short units about simple and concrete matters, not always communicating successfully. They provide information about matters of personal relevance, namely driving to work and traffic, in a simple way, using simple words and basic expressions to give their opinion (e.g. *I drive a car for work every day. I boring problem traffic so much.*).

The writer links words or groups of words with basic linear connectors (e.g. *and; but; why*). There is an instance where the writer indicates cause and effect when they attempt to explain why people choose to travel by car instead of using the bus (e.g. *example the increase a bus however we are have problem. why the people like travel by car.*), which suggests that this is a strong A1 script. However, the occasional absence of punctuation means effort is required from the reader to derive meaning from the text.

The writer's attempt to communicate the intended ideas is not always successful and the reader needs to read slowly and to try to interpret the text at times; this is because the writer produces a few simple grammatical forms with only limited control. Tenses are not mastered yet; only the simple present and base forms are available (e.g. *drive; increases; like*), and the writer lacks the necessary language resources to be able to add clarity to the intended message. The linguistic range is one of simple words and phrases (e.g. *a car; boring problem; drive; a bus*), and errors impede meaning at times (e.g. *they are love show high socail; example the increase a bus however we are have problem*). There is an attempt to use higher level words, too, and even an attempt at a more complex structure when doing so (*if the goverment want to reduce amount of traffice ...*), however, these are occasionally lifted from the prompt (*to reduce amount of traffice*) and the influence of the mother tongue is also evident at times (*traffice; socail*).

A2 candidate response

Bangkok is capital in Thailand. It is a big city. It has many people many cars and many traffic. In this city, everybody have a car for go to work or travel in other place. I think it is increasing the amount of traffic in this city. And problems have begin. They made CO2 from thier cars. It was destroy O-zone layer. It was hot weather in earth. I think for reduced the amount of traffic to tell many people you should go to work or travel together. Example you and co-worker go to work same way. you should go to work togerther when you have one car. It is fast to go to work. It has not traffic jam when you go to work. I think it is good idea for save our earth for the amount of traffic is increasing. You will not late to go to work or study. I think my idea has benefit for everybody in this city. I hope the amount of traffic is decreasing not increasing. I wonder many people can do it?

Commentary

The CEFR states that at A2 level, writers can produce simple texts on familiar subjects of interest, linking sentences with simple connectors like *and*. The writer has used their limited resources to write about the topic in simple terms and to express their opinion, positioning themselves in the discussion in a straightforward but effective way (*I think it is ...; I think my idea has benefit; I hope the amount of traffic is decreasing not increasing; I wonder many people can do it?*). The text has a sound organisational structure; greater grammatical control and range would allow the writer to bring their ideas into sharper focus.

The response is coherent, as the ideas are presented in a logical sequence of situation/problem/solution – although paragraphing would help to make this clearer. There are instances of signposting, even if they are not accurately realised (*Example*). In places, cohesion could be improved by the use of simple linking words or other cohesive devices. For example, the writer is able to convey to the reader the causes of the traffic congestion in their town by means of a series of simple sentences which a higher level writer might have combined together (*Bangkok is capital in Thailand. It is a big city. It has many people many cars and many traffic. In this city, everybody have a car for go to work or travel in other place. I think it is increasing the amount of traffic in this city.*) The absence of *'there is' / 'there are'* is also noticeable in various places in the text, with *'it is'* or *'it has'* being used, not always appropriately, as a substitute.

The consequences of the increase in traffic are also discussed, with this part of the discussion signposted in the text (*And problems have begin.*). By using a limited number of lexical items appropriate to the topic (*CO2; destroy O-zone layer*), the writer manages to communicate the intended meaning, which might otherwise have been obscured by the incorrect use of grammatical forms (*It was destroy; It was hot weather*). Where there are gaps in lexis, the writer uses circumlocution to get across the meaning (*go to work togerther when you have one car* [for *'sharing a car' / 'car-sharing'*]; *hot weather in earth* [for *'global warming'*]).

To propose and evaluate solutions to the problems identified, the writer uses a limited range of simple forms with some degree of accuracy (*I think for reduced the amount of traffic to tell many people you should go ...; I think it is good idea for save our earth*). Gaps in grammatical knowledge mean that the writer struggles to accurately convey the probable effects of their suggestion, relying

on a limited range of sentence structure, verb tenses and the placing of discrete sentences one after another to indicate cause and effect (*you should go to work together when you have one car. It is fast to go to work. It has not traffic jam when you go to work*).

B1 candidate response

Hello everyone!

It is not new that the traffic is increasing in our town, day by day the numbers of cars and lorries grow in the neighborhood. The car traffic is not a big problem for me, sometimes is bad but we can live with this situation. The big deal is the lorry traffic.

Lorries are very noise, when they passed by the street we can hear inside your house and this is very annoying because they used to passed at night too. Other issue is that the streets in this town are not large, so when a truck is passing the other drivers can not drive in the same street causing confusion and more noise. Is difficult for the lorry driver too, because is really hard and dangerous to drive a huge truck in a small street.

A possible solution for this problem would be to redirection the heavy traffic to other streets more large, like avenues. In the small streets we should keep only the local traffic and bus.

*Plese write your comments and opnions about the situation and help us a have a good town.
Thank you.*

Commentary

The CEFR states that at B1 level, writers can produce straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within their field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence. More specifically, they can produce a text on a topical subject, using simple language to list advantages and disadvantages, and give and justify their opinion. The writer has shown that they have a wide enough language repertoire to give reasons for and solutions to predictable problems as, in this case, a town's traffic problems.

The text is coherent and cohesive and the argument develops logically with some good signposting indicating that an idea is being expanded on (*and this is very annoying because ...*) or a new one is being introduced (*A possible solution for this problem ...; Is difficult for the driver lorry too ...; In the small streets we should ... only ...*). A range of cohesive devices is used to link ideas both within and across sentences. There are a few punctuation problems where commas are used to replace full stops (*in our town, day by day; Lorries are very noise, when they passed by the street ...*).

The tone and register used throughout the text are appropriate and the writer uses certain expressions effectively to highlight a viewpoint and to engage the reader's attention (*It is not new*

that ...; day by day ...; but we can live with this situation; A possible solution for this problem would be to ...). Occasionally, the word or expression used is too informal or not exactly appropriate (*the big deal*).

The writer shows a good control of simple grammatical structures (*Other issue ... confusion and more noise*) in communicating their ideas. The errors present in the text (*when they passed by; they used to pass at night; we can hear inside your house; would be to redirection*) generally do not prevent the meaning from being conveyed, although greater control of structures to express habitual actions would help improve clarity (*when they pass by* and *they usually pass* would be clearer).

There is a good range of everyday vocabulary related to the topic (*lorry traffic; very annoying; causing confusion; huge truck*). There are some spelling and lexical errors (*lorrys; very noise* (which should be 'very noisy'); *Plese; opnions; Other issue*) but these don't interfere with the meaning.

B2 candidate response

Hello. Recently, I've been concerned about the increase in the number of cars in our neighbourhood. This explosive increase is causing, air pollution, noise, and traffic accidents. I think we have to put a brake on this increase. To stop this increase, we have to know the reason why this increase is happening.

There are three reasons. First is the inconvenience of the metro. We have to propose some improvements of the metro system to the metro company, such as, ticket-buying systems, the number of trains, etc. If these problems will be solved, I'm pretty sure that the amount of traffic will be decreased. The second reason is the width of road. Most of the roads in this town are too narrow for cars to pass by. So, these narrow roads must be widened, in order to reduce amount of traffic. And the last reason is the fall in prices of gasoline. These days, the price of gasoline is falling so rapidly. I think the price of gasoline should be fixed in order to reduce this lorry traffic.

I hope metro companies and municipality will be checking my comment.

Commentary

The CEFR states that at B2 level, writers can express views effectively in writing, developing an argument and giving reasons in support of these views. The writer has produced a piece of writing which is coherent and connected, and which shows that they are able to discuss the issues concisely and make use of straightforward phrases to express their stance (*Recently, I've been concerned about ...; I think we have to ...; I hope ...*).

The writer has employed the structure and conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas. They have used a problem-solution

organisational pattern to structure the text, first stating the problem (*This explosive increase is causing, air pollution, noise, and traffic accidents*), then setting out three causes, each followed by a proposed solution. Linking devices have been used to overtly signal the relationship between ideas in the text (*we have to know the reason why this increase is happening. There are three reasons. First ...; The second reason is ...; the last reason is ...*). There is, however, a certain amount of unnecessary repetition of some phrases which affects the flow of the text at times (*I think we have to put a brake on this increase. To stop this increase, we have to know the reason why this increase is happening.*). Appropriate use of reference and ellipsis would have prevented this from happening and would have aided cohesion. (The section could be rephrased as: '*I think we have to put a brake on this increase. To do this, we have to ...*' to achieve the desired effect.)

The writer has used a range of simple structures with a good degree of accuracy to express their viewpoint and suggest solutions to the problems (*We have to propose some improvements of the metro system; these narrow roads must be widened; I think the price of gasoline should be fixed*). However, errors relating to verb tense and aspect are present (*If these problems will be solved, I'm pretty sure that the amount of traffic will be decreased; I hope metro companies and municipality will be checking my comment*), affecting the precision in expressing ideas.

A range of vocabulary is used to discuss the topic. It is notable that the writer has made good use of nominalisation, which conveys information concisely, and which is appropriate to discursive types of writing (*This explosive increase; the inconvenience of the metro; ticket-buying systems; the width of [the] road; the fall in prices of gasoline*). There is a reasonable range of vocabulary used with some degree of flexibility to describe changes in levels (*increase, decreased, reduce, fall*).

C1 candidate response

I am writing this comment to complain about the worrying increase in car and lorry traffic in our town lately.

As far as I am concerned, the main reason for this issue is that a 40-block building is being constructed in our neighborhood. Lorries need to function at full speed to carry necessary material for the construction. Moreover, the main road that leads to the center of the city is banned for decoration of the coming festival. People whose workplaces are located in the center have no choice but to drive through our town to their work everyday. Therefore, our town, which used to be quiet and peaceful, has become noisier. The citizens in the town not only endure the syren that is made by the vehicles, but also suffer from illnesses caused by air-polluted, especially the elderly. They cannot sleep well at night since the lorries works 24 hours per day. Everything is dusty because of carelessly covered containers of the lorries. We cannot let our children play at the playground of the town for the fear that they can put themselves in danger. Futhermore, we are usually late for work and school because of traffic jams in crush hours.

As a citizen of the town, I think the authority should take action to reduce the amount of traffic that travels to our town every day. Lorries must be banned in crush hours. Moreover, the container of

lorries should be covered carefully in order not to drop any material that they are carrying. Last but not least, people should be shown other ways that lead to the center so that they do not put pressure on our frastructure.

I hope that my complain can be taken into consideration so that our town can become an enjoyable place to live again.


Commentary

The CEFR states that at C1 level, writers can produce clear, well-structured texts on complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, and expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points and reasons. The writer here provides evidence of their ability to do this.

The writer has employed the structure and conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas while maintaining a consistent tone throughout. The text is well organised and uses a straightforward organisational pattern to good effect. The writer uses a number of expressions to signal the purpose for writing and to make their stance clear (*I am writing this comment to complain about the worrying increase; As far as I am concerned; As a citizen of the town, I think the authority should; I hope that my complain can be taken into consideration*). They set out the causes of the increase in traffic, and then detail the effect this has on residents, overtly signalling the transition between these two parts of the text (*Therefore, our town, which used to be quiet and peaceful, has become noisier*). Solutions to the problems are then put forward in a new paragraph, with this stage of the discussion also clearly signposted (*I think the authority should take action to reduce the amount of traffic ...*). The text is cohesive, however, there is a slight over-reliance on a limited number of linking words, which are deployed a little formulaically for writing at this level (*Moreover; Therefore; Furthermore*).

Some complex grammatical forms have been used to underline the principal causes of the increased congestion (*the main reason for this issue is that a 40-block building is being constructed in our neighborhood; People whose workplaces are located in the center have no choice but to drive ...*). Similarly, a variety of structures is used with a good degree of control to outline the various ways in which residents are affected by the congestion (*The citizens in the town not only endure the ... but also suffer from ..., especially the elderly*). A limited range of structures is used to put forward solutions (*lorries must be banned; the container of lorries should be covered carefully in order not to ...; people should be shown other ways ... so that they ...*), although these are not expanded upon.

The writer has used a reasonable range of vocabulary relevant to the topic, including some complex noun phrases (*necessary material for the construction; carelessly covered containers*) and collocations (*put themselves in danger; take action*). Although the meaning is clear, there are imprecisions in the use of a fair number of lexical items (*40-block building; syren that is made; air-polluted; playground of the town; crush hour; frastructure; my complain*). The writer should receive credit for attempting to use this lexis; greater accuracy would contribute to a higher score.



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