INTO EUROPE
The Writing Handbook

INTO EUROPE
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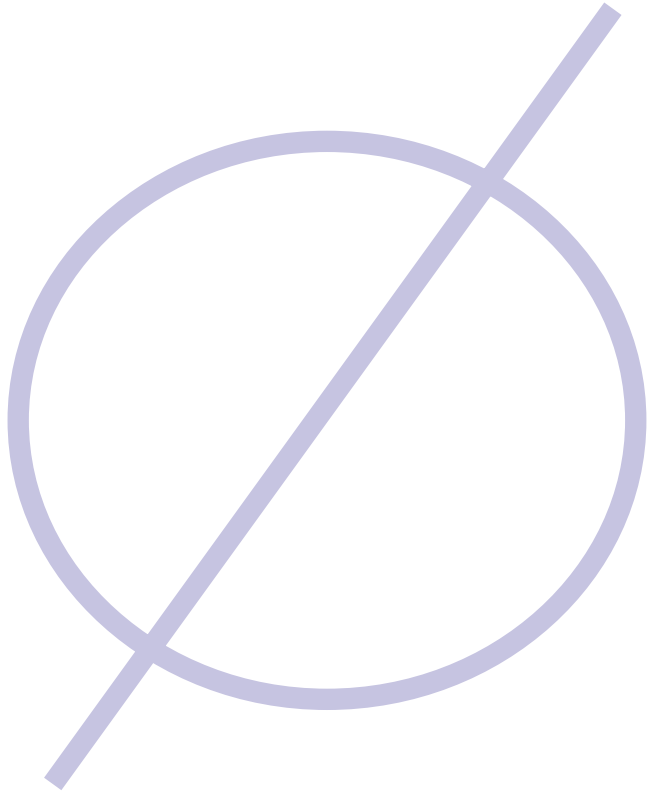**Listening**

Into Europe
The Writing Handbook

GyulaTankó

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

Modern Europe encourages mobility of labour and of students across the frontiers of the European Union and beyond. In order to be able to take up study places or work opportunities, knowledge of a foreign language is essential. In the modern Europe, it is increasingly important not only to be able to use a foreign language, especially a widespread and widely learned language like English, but also to be able to prove that one can use the language at the level required by employers, schools, universities or other agencies. And that means passing a recognised, valid examination which offers certificates in a foreign language.
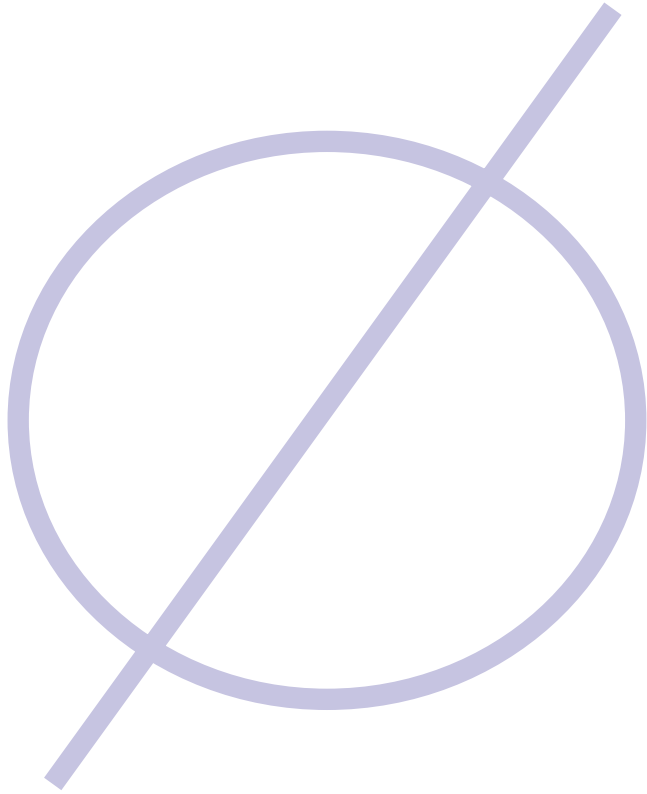
The 'Into Europe' series is intended to provide teachers and learners alike with opportunities to prepare to pass modern European examinations of English. The series originated in a British-Council-funded project spanning some seven years, which initially developed communicative, skill-based test tasks to contribute to the reform of English school-leaving examinations in Hungary. Recently the Council decided to make these tasks and associated guidelines and advice more widely available, in order to help teachers and students understand the levels and demands of modern European exams.

This book is the third in the series, and it provides an introduction to tests of writing ability, as well as guidance on how teachers can assess writing. It looks at how writers write, what tasks they perform and what features make a learner's text good, from a testing perspective. It also describes key concepts in assessing writing in teaching and examination settings (for example, the use of rating scales, the importance of ensuring reliable scores and how to do this, and so on).

The Writing Handbook provides a range of different writing tasks, together with a description of what the main features of these tasks are and how teachers can create similar writing tasks. It also presents scripts produced by real learners, which are annotated with raters' comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the scripts. The tasks and scripts have been selected to represent the levels specified by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

This volume focuses on the most frequent writing tasks used in modern English language tests. It will serve as a tool for professional development, giving teachers advice on how they can prepare their students for the writing section of modern European English examinations. The Writing Handbook is also a valuable resource for practice of writing in class, and for classroom-based assessment of students' writing ability.

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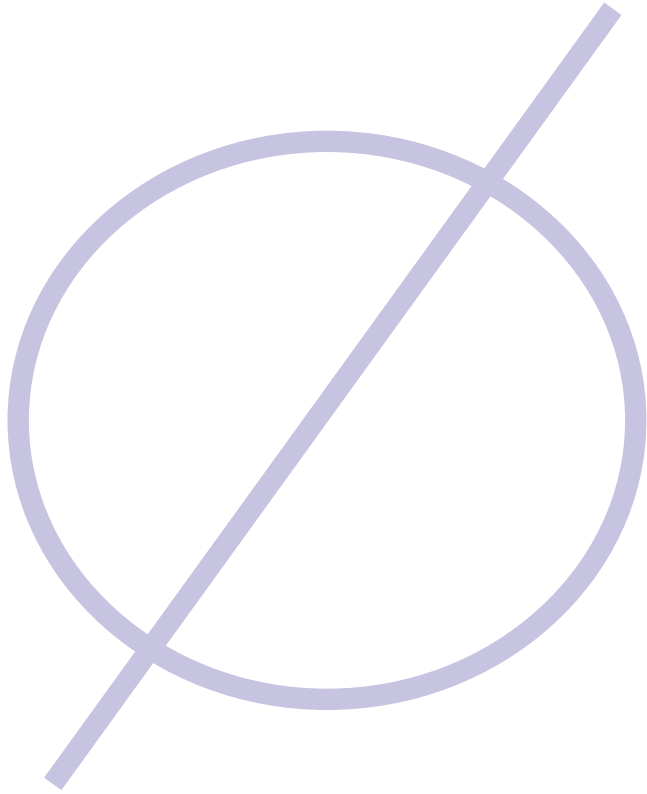
PART ONE
BACKGROUND AND AIMS

Introduction

This book is the third in a series of books on reading and use of English, speaking, writing and listening aimed at teachers and students who plan to take an examination in English. That examination may be a school-leaving examination, some other type of national or regional examination, or an international examination. It will hopefully be a recognised examination which is based upon international standards of quality, and which relates to common European levels – those of the Council of Europe. If your students are planning to take such an examination, then this book is for you.

"Into Europe" is the result of a British Council-funded project spanning some six years, which initially developed test tasks in Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking, as well as Use of English for the reform of the Hungarian School-Leaving Examinations in English. The Project was conducted under an agreement with the Hungarian Ministry of Education, through its agency OKI (the National Institute of Education), and the task of the Project was to produce test specifications, guidelines for test writers, and test tasks or 'items'. The test tasks produced were tested on large samples of students similar to those who would take school-leaving examinations in the future. The Project also trained test writers in modern testing techniques, raters of spoken and written performance, and developed procedures for test development and test administration. As a result, not only were testing procedures developed according to modern European standards, but also a large number of tasks were piloted and calibrated over four years. In addition, the Project developed in-service training courses for teachers of English to help them become aware of the demands of modern European examinations and how best to prepare their students for such examinations.

In order to help teachers and students understand the levels and demands of modern European examinations, the British Council has decided to make these calibrated tasks available to a wider public, as it believes that such tasks are valuable for those who wish to take any of a number of modern English examinations, not only the Hungarian School-Leaving Examination. We hope that you agree and will find this book useful in preparing for modern European English examinations.

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Chapter 1
To the Teacher

This handbook is intended to help teachers who have to administer and design tests of writing that meet the standards of modern European English examinations. The handbook gives an overview of the composing process in order to describe the ability that a test of writing measures, discusses the text types most frequently encountered in a range of writing examinations, provides an introduction to designing writing tasks, describes the main types of rating scales, and systematically explores the criteria most frequently used in the assessment of writing skills. In addition to this, the handbook also gives practical advice for language teachers who want to develop their students' writing skills or are preparing them for the written part of language examinations.

The aim of modern English examinations is to give candidates tasks that require them to use language as similarly to real-life situations as possible. Such tasks present candidates with a variety of lifelike writing situations that allow them to perform different language functions to achieve their communicative goals. The tasks therefore present carefully designed contexts in which candidates have to address topics relevant to them to achieve specific communicative purposes.

The tasks administered in modern English examinations attempt to ensure that candidates produce their own texts rather than reproduce memorised texts. The aim is to elicit language that is suitable for getting the candidate's message across. In modern English examinations more emphasis is laid on successful communication than on accuracy: a candidate does not have to produce a text that is perfectly accurate in order to be understood and communicate.

The writing tasks administered in modern English examinations represent a variety of task types that have different rhetorical structures and may combine different rhetorical modes. The complexity of the different task types and the topics that candidates need to address determine the difficulty level of the task. Naturally, learners at higher levels of proficiency can be expected to attempt and successfully complete writing tasks that require familiarity with complex text types and the skilful handling of a wide range of language functions. To ensure that language proficiency is interpreted the same way and the candidates' performance can be compared in the European context, the Council of Europe has devised a common framework called *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), or *Common European Framework* (CEF) for short. Examination tasks for the assessment of writing skills should be designed so as to be closely related to the levels of language proficiency within the Common European Framework.

The CEF scale has six major levels that range from what is often called "beginner" or "false beginner" to "highly advanced", but since what is considered a beginner in one context may be considered intermediate in another context, instead of such labels the scale uses letters and numbers to mark the different levels. A1 is the lowest level and C2 is the highest level. The level descriptors

formulate the typical or likely behaviour of learners by stating what they *can do* rather than what they cannot do. Each level includes the levels below it on the scale, for example, a B1 level candidate can do not only what is included in the 'Can' do statements at B1 level but also everything from A2 and A1 levels.

The Framework provides illustrative scales for overall written production, and subscales for creative writing, reports and essays. The levels for the overall written production are specified in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 CEF Overall Written Production

	OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION
C2	*Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.*
C1	*Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.*
B2	*Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.*
B1	*Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.*
A2	*Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.*
A1	*Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.*

(Council of Europe, 2001: page 61)

The main difference between the levels is determined by text and topic complexity. At lower levels candidates are expected to be able to produce simple texts that consist of loosely connected sentences and address familiar topics that they encounter on a daily basis. At higher levels candidates are expected to produce texts of higher complexity on a variety of concrete and abstract topics.

The illustrative scale for creative writing (Table 1.2) contains descriptors for all the levels and has two levels that contain a subdivision. Levels A2 and B2 are divided in two levels. In each subdivision the higher level defines a proficiency level that is higher than the criterion level but does not reach the next main level. The subdivisions allow for finer differentiation between the writing abilities of candidates.

The scale for reports and essays (Table 1.3) does not contain descriptors for levels A1 and A2, which indicates that candidates at these levels of proficiency are not expected to be able to produce such complex text types. Two of the levels (B1 and B2) have subdivisions that specify what text types the candidate can handle

and with what mastery. At B1 level the lower subdivision does not expect candidates to be able to write essays, but essay writing becomes a requirement from the higher subdivision within the criterion.

Table 1.2 CEF Scale for Creative Writing

	CREATIVE WRITING
C2	*Can write clear, smoothly flowing, and fully engrossing stories and descriptions of experience in a style appropriate to the genre adopted.*
C1	*Can write clear, detailed, well-structured and developed descriptions and imaginative texts in an assured, personal, natural style appropriate to the reader in mind.*
B2	*Can write clear, detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences, marking the relationship between ideas in clear connected text, and following established conventions of the genre concerned.*
	Can write clear, detailed descriptions on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest. *Can write a review of a film, book or play.*
B1	*Can write straightforward, detailed descriptions on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest.* *Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text. Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined. Can narrate a story.*
A2	*Can write about everyday aspects of his/her environment, e.g. people, places, a job or study experience in linked sentences.* *Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences.*
	Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences about his/her family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. *Can write short, simple imaginary biographies and simple poems about people.*
A1	*Can write simple phrases and sentences about him/herself and imaginary people, where they live and what they do.*

(Council of Europe, 2001: page 62)

Table 1.3 CEF Scale for Reports and Essays

	REPORTS AND ESSAYS
C2	*Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, complex reports, articles or essays which present a case, or give critical appreciation of proposals or literary works. Can provide an appropriate and effective logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.*
C1	*Can write clear, well-structured expositions of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues. Can expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples.*
B2	*Can write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail. Can evaluate different ideas or solutions to a problem.*
	Can write an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Can synthesise information and arguments from a number of sources.
B1	*Can write short, simple essays on topics of interest. Can summarise, report and give his/her opinion about accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence.*
	Can write very brief reports to a standard conventionalised format, which pass on routine factual information and state reasons for actions.
A2	*No descriptor available*
A1	*No descriptor available*

(Council of Europe, 2001: page 62)

The Framework also provides scales for overall written interaction and subscales for correspondence and notes, messages and forms. The levels for the overall written interaction are specified in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 CEF Scale for Overall Written Interaction

	OVERALL WRITTEN INTERACTION
C2	*As C1*
C1	*Can express him/herself with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively.*
B2	*Can express news and views effectively in writing, and relate to those of others.*
B1	*Can convey information and ideas on abstract as well as concrete topics, check information and ask about or explain problems with reasonable precision. Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point he/she feels to be important.*
A2	*Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need.*
A1	*Can ask for or pass on personal details in written form.*

(Council of Europe, 2001: page 83)

As in the case of the overall written production, the difference between the levels is defined in terms of the topics that candidates can address and the text types that they can handle. At lower levels candidates are expected to be able to write about personal issues and matters of immediate concern in the form of a simple text, such as a note. The descriptors at level B1 define two markedly different levels of ability. A lower B1 level candidate can write personal letters and address simple topics, whereas a higher B1 level candidate can develop more complex topics.

The higher the level the more is expected from the candidates in terms of the quality of the interaction they can engage in. A stronger B1 level candidate can *ask about or explain problems* in writing, a B2 level candidate can relate effectively to the ideas expressed by others, and a C1 or C2 level candidate is expected to be able to engage in any form of interactive written communication with any reader.

The correspondence subscale presented in Table 1.5 outlines what candidates can do as far as postcard and letter writing skills are concerned. At lower levels the descriptors refer to postcards, the simplest form of written interaction after notes. Letters vary from those that formulate short and simple messages (e.g. *thank you letter*) to more complex ones at higher levels. Once again, it is the topic and complexity of ideas communicated that make the difference between the levels.

Table 1.5 CEF Scale for Correspondence

	CORRESPONDENCE
C2	*As C1*
C1	*Can express him/herself with clarity and precision in personal correspondence, using language flexibly and effectively, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.*
B2	*Can write letters conveying degrees of emotion and highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences and commenting on the correspondent's news and views.*
B1	*Can write personal letters giving news and expressing thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music and films.*
	Can write personal letters describing experiences, feelings and events in some detail.
A2	*Can write very simple personal letters expressing thanks and apology.*
A1	*Can write a short simple postcard.*

(Council of Europe, 2001: page 83)

The descriptors given in the subscale for notes, messages and forms (Table 1.6) indicate that the testing of these text types is an issue especially at level B1 and below. It is taken for granted that candidates at B2 level and above can handle any of these text types.

Table 1.6 CEF Scale for Notes, Messages and Forms

	NOTES, MESSAGES & FORMS
C2	*As B1*
C1	*As B1*
B2	*As B1*
B1	*Can take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems.*
	Can write notes conveying simple information of immediate relevance to friends, service people, teachers and others who feature in his/her everyday life, getting across comprehensibly the points he/she feels are important.
A2	*Can take a short, simple message provided he/she can ask for repetition and reformulation. Can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need.*
A1	*Can write numbers and dates, own name, nationality, address, age, date of birth or arrival in the country, etc. such as on a hotel registration form.*

(Council of Europe, 2001: page 84)

These scales can be used as guidelines by test developers because the descriptors state clearly what learners are expected to be able to do: what texts they should be able to write, what topics they should be able to deal with, and what language they should be able to use to realise their communicative goals.

Modern European language examinations that are linked to the CEF levels make possible the interpretation of their levels across Europe. The Cambridge ESOL main suite of exams, for example, are aimed at specific CEF levels. The Key English Test (KET) is aimed at A2 and the Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) is aimed at C2. However, not only international examinations should define their levels in relation to the Framework, but all other high-stakes European examinations should do so.

The Hungarian School-Leaving Examination is, according to current documents, said to be at A2 and B1 for the so-called Intermediate level, and at B2 for the so-called Advanced level. This does not reflect the approach of modern European examinations, which are aimed at only one CEF level because this way the candidates' language ability can be measured more reliably. The reliability of an examination is enhanced if candidates have to perform on tasks that can elicit the features of performance given in the specific CEF levels.

A writing examination, however, can only be claimed to measure language ability at a particular CEF level if there is sufficient evidence that the examination meets certain standards of quality control. The tasks need to be moderated by an editing committee (a group of experienced item writers), then piloted with real students, and finally revised in the light of the pilot examinations. It usually takes several rounds of careful editing, piloting and revision before a task is given its final shape. The tasks that are included in this book, with the exception of some of the tasks recommended for writing practice, have been edited, piloted and revised. Those tasks that were not subjected to this rigorous programme of quality control are modelled on the tasks that have been and are expected to be of the same quality. The scripts that illustrate various features of written texts or are included for assessment practice purposes were written by Hungarian students as part of the pilot examinations.

In order to be able to claim that a task does indeed measure a specific level, the level of the task must be established. During this procedure experts examine the relationship between the task and the Common European Framework of Reference to decide which (minimum) level a learner must be at if he or she is to complete the task successfully.

Writing is a subjective test. Examiners of writing skills are not making a simple decision whether an answer is right or wrong but have to do something more complex: they use a rating scale consisting of several bands and descriptors to assess a script. It is very important that examiners understand what rating scales measure and that they can interpret correctly and use consistently the descriptors in the scales.

Two things are necessary in order to be able to do this: (1) the rating scale used for the assessment of writing must be valid and reliable, and (2) the examiners must be reliable. A reliable and valid rating scale is the result of a long process

during which the rating scale is tried out in order to test, for instance, whether raters interpret the descriptors the same way, whether the scale is suitable to make fine distinctions between different quality scripts, or whether it is appropriate for the assessment of the writing tasks to which it is applied.

If the rating scale is suitable for rating writing, the next step is to ensure that it is used appropriately. All the work invested in designing a writing scale can be wasted if the scale is not used correctly and consistently by all the examiners. Obviously, the more examiners use a scale the more likely it is that it will not be used consistently unless all the examiners have received training in its use. However carefully designed and easy-to-use a scale is, a group of untrained markers using it will most probably give different marks for the same script. It does not matter whether the examiner is a writing expert or a language teacher who does not deal more with writing than teach the odd writing unit from a course book. Experts or not, all examiners will interpret the scale their own way and this will result in unreliable assessment. Without training it may happen, for example, that the same script gets two different scores, maybe one with which the candidate fails and one with which she passes the exam, from two examiners working in two different examination centres.

In order to make sure that the rating is reliable and that examiners can be trained, standards must be set. In writing assessment this is done with bench-marking. **Bench-marking** is a process that must be repeated every time before the rating begins, especially in the case of an examination that is administered rarely, for example, once a year. After the examination, a chief examiner and a small group of experts read a number of the scripts produced in the examination, and keeping the rating scale in mind select some that represent various levels of performances (i.e. weak, average, good scripts). Once the scripts are selected, the chief examiner and the group of experts, that is the members of the **bench-marking committee**, rate each script individually, using the rating scale. When they have rated the scripts, the members of the bench-marking committee meet to compare and discuss the marks they have awarded to the scripts. Their aims are to reach a consensus concerning the marks awarded to the scripts and if necessary to improve the rating scale.

The marks that are agreed upon by the members of the bench-marking committee for the scripts are called **benchmarks**. The benchmarked scripts represent different levels of performance and are used as model performances with which examiners can be trained in what is called a **standardisation meeting** or **rater training**.

The scripts in this book have been benchmarked by a team of experts and the justifications given for the scores (benchmarks) have been drafted on the basis of these experts' comments.

The participants in the rater training are the chief examiner or another member of the bench-marking committee and a number of examiners. The aim of the meeting is to help examiners understand the rating scale and the rating process. Before the rater training examiners rate individually some of the scripts selected by the bench-marking committee, and make a note of the reasons why they

awarded a particular score. At the meeting the benchmarks are compared with the marks given by the examiners. If there are differences, the examiners must be given the reasons that justify the experts' scores. The aim of this meeting is to help the examiners to learn to use the rating scale in the same way as the experts.

In the second part of the rater training, the examiners rate individually the remaining benchmarked scripts and this time their scores are expected to match the benchmarks. If their scores match the benchmarks, it means that the examiners have learnt to interpret the descriptors of the rating scale the same way as the members of the bench-marking committee. This in turn is expected to mean that two examiners will award the same score or almost identical scores for the same script when they mark the rest of the scripts.

However, even if they have participated in the training programme, it may happen that because of various reasons (e.g. place and time of rating) the examiners occasionally fail to follow the standards they learned during the rater training. This is especially dangerous if the scripts are marked by one examiner only. Modern European examinations therefore use double marking in writing assessment. This means that each script is rated independently by two examiners. If the two examiners have applied the rating scale in accordance with the practice developed in the course of the rater training, they will award the same or closely similar scores for the same script. Different examinations have different procedures for the cases when the scores of two examiners differ. For example, if the difference is small, the average of the two scores may be calculated. If the difference is big, a third rater is asked to rate the script independently.

In order to check whether the examiners apply the rating scale consistently, their intra-rater and inter-rater reliability can be checked. The intra-rater reliability check shows whether an examiner agrees with him or herself when rating the same script on different occasions. Ideally, if an examiner rates a script on two different days, he or she should award the same score. If this happens, it means that they interpreted the rating scale in the same way on both occasions.

However, even if they agree with themselves, examiners may not agree with other raters who use the same scale to rate the same script. They may be consistent but idiosyncratic and as a consequence unreliable. The inter-rater reliability check shows whether two different examiners apply the rating scale in the same way, that is, whether there is agreement between the raters. Two examiners rating the same script are expected to give the same or closely similar scores.

In order to ensure that the candidates are assessed fairly and that they do not fail their examination because of the unreliability of an examiner, raters should use reliable and valid scales. They should regularly participate in a training programme to learn to use standards consistently. Test administrators should use double marking and apply routine checks to find those examiners whose rating is unreliable. This is especially important in the case of a high-stakes examination like a school-leaving or an entrance examination.

Organisation of this book

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 gives a general introduction to the book and to the skill it deals with. The aim of Chapter 2 (Writing) is to review the writing process together with the key concepts related to the production of a script and to give practical advice for writing teachers. It discusses the differences between the spoken and written registers and presents an inventory of the subskills of writing through the description of the writing process. The chapter also addresses the factors that influence the writing process and gives a range of suggestions for the language classroom.

Part 2 consists of a chapter on task design and further chapters that describe in detail the task types that occur most frequently in language examinations. The aim of Chapter 3 (Designing Tasks for Writing Skills Assessment) is to help teachers in evaluating and designing writing assessment tasks. It presents a systematic analysis of the components of writing tasks and describes their characteristic features. It gives a practical introduction to task design, the analysis and revision of writing tasks, and describes the procedure with which a task should be tried out in order to determine its suitability and effectiveness.

Chapters 4-6 are devoted to the three text types (letter, article, composition) that occur most frequently in language examinations. Each chapter describes the general features of a text type and discusses the layout, organisation, content and style typical of it. The chapters contain tips for the teacher and the writer and a collection of writing tasks suitable for writing practice or assessment purposes.

Part 3 focuses on assessing writing skills. It starts with a discussion of rating scales in Chapter 7 (Rating scales), and presents the analytic rating scale developed by the Hungarian School–Leaving Examination Reform Project for the Model writing examination. This analytic rating scale is accompanied by Guidelines for Raters and a Summary of the Level-Specific Expectations. Each task designed by the Examination Reform Project comes with a task-specific rating scheme that gives instructions to raters concerning what they should take into consideration during rating. The next four chapters discuss the criteria of the rating scale one-by-one, present sample analyses of scripts and provide guided rating practice.

Chapter 2
Writing

The nature of writing

In a letter to a friend written in a university entrance examination, an eighteen-year-old candidate wrote: *Writing is just grammar, anyone can learn it. But speaking …it's the language.* These sentences voice an attitude that still prevails in connection with writing. Given that of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) it is writing which is the least often used by most speakers of any language, and that the development of good writing skills takes a lot of effort on both the language learner's and the language teacher's part, this skill is frequently neglected. Little emphasis is laid on the systematic teaching of writing skills. Writing practice in the form of timed activities and tasks that require students to create a whole piece (for example, a letter or an article) within a set time is rare or it is used as a test of grammar or vocabulary knowledge. Student writing is rarely assessed in such a manner that it reveals strengths and weaknesses in writing skills. The evaluation of student writing is often restricted to highlighting grammatical and vocabulary errors in a script and to giving a grade. No effective written commentary, or feedback, is given to students, who are as a consequence rarely encouraged to improve their work through multiple drafts of the same script rewritten with the help of the teacher's or peers' comments. All this happens in spite of the fact that modern European English examinations test the writing skills of candidates in order to determine their overall language proficiency.

Is writing *just grammar*? Obviously this is an oversimplification that came from a language classroom where writing was used to test whether the students had acquired a particular grammar point. Writing, just like speaking, is a form of communication. It is *the language,* or more exactly one possible form in which language occurs. However, speaking and writing are very different. Even in the case of the mother tongue, to become a good writer takes more than learning to speak and more than simply recording speech on a piece of paper with the help of the letters of the alphabet.

Speech and writing differ in a number of ways. First of all, the communication situation itself is dissimilar. The speaker's partner, the listener, is present and usually visible, so the speaker can make use of a series of devices such as gestures, facial expression, voice or eye contact to communicate ideas. If the listener does not understand or disagrees with something, she can signal or tell the speaker that clarification is needed and the speaker can explain or revise his ideas straight away. Writers, however, cannot rely on the devices available to speakers. They have to compose their texts in the absence of the reader and have to make sure that the ideas are communicated effectively so that the reader will fully understand the message. As a consequence, writing a coherent text that communicates the writer's intended message is a challenging task.

Free speech and writing differ in a number of ways (Table 2.1). Well articulated

writing is structured: the ideas developed are carefully organised and accurately formulated so as to avoid ambiguity of meaning. The actual writing is preceded by the collection of information to be included in the script and by the organisation of the information into a logical sequence of ideas: writing is premeditated, planned beforehand. An effectively written script expresses ideas clearly and briefly, that is it communicates more in the same number of words than speech. In writing, a number of rules concerning grammar (e.g. sentence structure, tense, spelling, punctuation), layout (e.g. the position of the sender's address in an official letter), and structural elements (e.g. the presence of a concluding section in an essay) must be carefully observed.

Table 2.1 Differences between the information communicated in free speech and writing

Speech	Writing
less structured	more structured
spontaneous	premeditated
low in content	high in content

Writing is therefore an activity that is considerably more controlled than a conversation. It is a language skill that must be explicitly taught and regularly practised. If students want to master a particular skill, they have to become proficient in the subskills that constitute the skill. Once they have learnt and practised the subskills, students can be tested on them to determine how much they have improved. The following section discusses the various stages of the writing process and their key elements.

The writing process

Writing is a complex activity that requires much more than good language knowledge. Language learners may fail to write well-articulated scripts even if they have an excellent command of English. The complexity of the writing process arises from the fact that while a text is linear, in other words it takes the reader one idea at a time from the first idea to the last, its composition is a recursive process. Good writers frequently revise their scripts: for example, they add or remove ideas included at the beginning or rearrange them to make the script more logical.
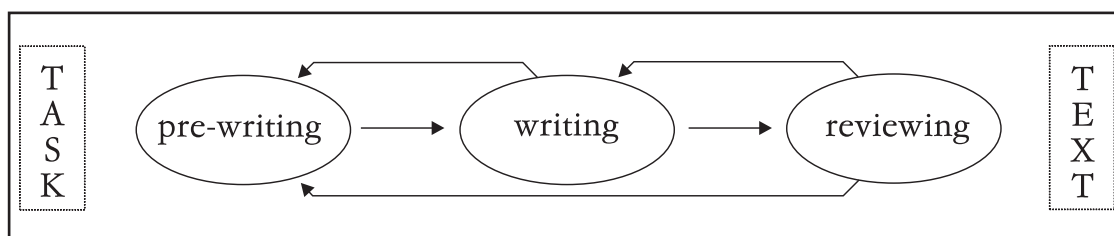
Figure 2.1 The writing process

There are three major stages in the writing process (Figure 2.1): pre-writing, writing and reviewing. Although good writers do work through these stages in order, during the composing process they may go back from the writing stage to the pre-writing stage and make some modifications, or at the reviewing stage they may decide to rewrite part of the script, so they move back to the writing stage.

Pre-writing

In the pre-writing stage the writer thinks about the writing context, and collects ideas to be included in the script. In order to understand the writing context, the writer must understand the **purpose** of writing. The purpose determines the function of a piece of writing. For example, the function of a letter of complaint is to express the writer's dissatisfaction and to suggest some kind of action in order to solve the problem. The function of a review is to present a book, a film or a theatre performance to the reader, to evaluate it and maybe recommend it. Function determines the kind of information that is going to be included and the order in which the ideas occur in the script, in other words the **content** and **organisation** of a piece of writing.

The concept of **genre** or **text type** is directly related to writing purpose. Recipes, for example, form a text type (Figure 2.2). They have a typical form or layout, and the information in them is organised in a specific way. The name of the type of food functions as a title; it is followed by the list of ingredients with the required amounts specified; and the main part of the text describes what is to be done with the ingredients in order to prepare the food. Recipes usually end with suggestions on how the food is to be served.

Letters represent another text type with a typical form and information structure (Figure 2.3). The letter does not have a title but a salutation (for example, *Dear Jennie*), and unlike a recipe it usually includes at least the sender's address and the date when it was written. Both recipes and letters are conventionalised pieces of writing; language users know what their function is, what their form is like, what kind of information they contain, and how this information is organised.

Cold Coffee

Ingredients:
5 cups cold milk
1/2 cup boiling water
6 tsp. instant coffee powder
3 tbsp. sugar crushed ice

Method
Dissolve instant coffee powder and sugar in boiling water and allow to cool. Blend the coffee mixture and milk in a blender for a few seconds. Add cream and crushed ice. Blend for another few seconds till it becomes frothy.

Serve chilled.

Figure 2.2 Sample recipe

> Budapest
> Pf. 35.
> 1146
>
> September 3, 2003
>
> *Dear Jennie,*
>
> *How are you? I just wanted to drop you a line to tell you about our new house. It's really big so I finally have a room of my own! There is a huge living room with large windows from which you can see the garden. The kitchen's big too. Mom loves it.*
>
> *There are a few trees in the garden and we shall plant some more in the autumn. I don't want too many trees because we won't be able to play badminton. Why can't parents listen to their children sometimes?*
>
> *Well, I must be going now. We are meeting some of our neighbours. Hope they have some kids of my age. That'd be cool.*
>
> *I will give you a call soon.*
>
> *Take care,*
> *Kata*

Figure 2.3 Sample letter

Postcards, articles, reviews, or research papers all represent different text types with distinct conventions. In order to become skilled writers, language learners must practise writing different text types. The knowledge of text types is an important component of writing skills, and it is tested in language examinations where students are required to write letters, reports, articles, reviews, essays, etc. The text type thus determines the kind of information included, the organisation of the information, and the layout of a piece of writing.

In order to understand the writing context, the writer must also have a clear understanding of the **audience**, namely the person or persons who are going to read the script. The audience influences the content and the style of the message. If a student is writing a note with instructions to a flatmate about where he can find a particular CD in his room, he will not have to clarify in the note how his flatmate can get to his room. However, a note written to a visiting foreign friend new to the house may have to include this piece of information. Therefore, the writer's knowledge of or assumptions about what the audience already knows determine what must be explicitly included in a script. The communication becomes ineffective if the reader is given too much unnecessary information or too little information.

The audience also determines the style of a piece of writing. When writing to his pen-friend, the student uses informal style (short sentences, a personal and friendly tone, colloquial vocabulary). The same student will probably use formal style (carefully selected vocabulary, or politeness formulas such as *Please tell me …* as opposed to *Tell me …*) to write a note for his host family in London or his English teacher.

Understanding the writing context means, therefore, that writers know why they are writing (purpose), what they are writing about (content), and who they are writing to (audience). In order to understand the writing context, students must be able to answer the questions presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Clarifying the writing context

function	Why am I writing this piece of text? What kind of text type do I have to write?
content	What ideas do I have to include? In what order do I have to arrange them?
audience	Who am I writing for? How explicit do I have to make the ideas I include? What style should I use?

A close reading of the writing task given in Figure 2.4 reveals the features of the writing context that writers must observe in order to solve the task appropriately.

Students reading this task have to understand first the purpose of writing. They have to write a script about class trips and give their opinion about what makes a class trip good. However, simply listing the characteristics of a good class trip is not enough. Students have to state why they think that a particular set of characteristics makes a good class trip; in other words, they have to convince their readers why their suggestions are sensible. Therefore, the purpose of writing in this case is to give justified recommendations about what makes a good class trip.

Your school has an English language student magazine and you want to write an **article** for it about what makes a good class trip. Look at the notes below and write about the different possibilities. Give reasons why you think one is better than the other.

• How to travel?
• Where to stay?
• What to eat?
• Where to go?

Write an article of about **180 words** in an appropriate style. Use the title *Tips for a good class trip*.
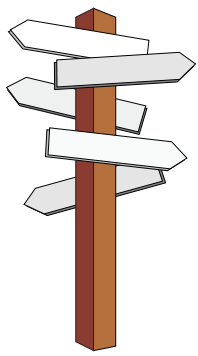
Figure 2.4 Sample writing task

In order to determine the purpose of the script, the candidate attempting the task must identify the relevant key words. These words in the above task are *article,* which names the text type and implies that the candidate must write an informative and interesting text; and <u>*write about*</u> *the different possibilities,* which together with *[g]ive reasons why,* instruct the candidate to include descriptions as well as justifications into the script.

The content of the script can be determined easily since the task provides a list of topics: means of transport, accommodation, food, and destination. The students do not have to generate ideas; they only have to concentrate on organising the information provided. They may wish to address the topics in the order in which they are listed in the task or they may choose to reorganise them. For instance, they may choose to follow the order in which these topics would normally be dealt with when a class plans a trip. The class would perhaps proceed in the following order: they would first decide about the destination, and then about the means of transport, about accommodation, and finally about food. Alternatively, students may want to organise their script by discussing the characteristics of the class trip in order of importance. They may claim that it is the kind of accommodation that makes or breaks a class trip, and decide to write about accommodation first and leave food to be discussed last, since they may not think that food is crucial to the success of the trip.

The students' task is to write an article. This means that in addition to the topics listed in the task, they have to draw on their knowledge about the text type called article. They have to write a short and enticing introduction that sets out what the article intends to accomplish, and after the suggested topics have been discussed, they must round up the article in a way that is appropriate to the text type.

The students must also have a clear image of their audience, the people who are going to read their articles. In the case of the above task, the audience is composed of fellow students who read the English language school magazine. These readers know what a class trip is, so the writers do not have to define the concept for them. They do, however, have to state clearly the differences between travelling by train and travelling by bus if they want to convince their readers that one is better than the other. Moreover, they have to use a relaxed and friendly style because they are addressing peers. A formal style may have the opposite effect to what the writer wants to achieve: readers may very easily decide to ignore the suggestions that they feel are not meant for them or are too pompous. The role relationship between the writer and the audience in this case is a student writing to fellow students and the style must reflect this.

Having understood what they are writing about, who they are writing to, and what text type they have to produce, students make the appropriate decisions about the content, style, tone, and text type features of the script. They can now proceed to the writing stage.

Writing

In most books on writing, the writing stage refers strictly to the writing of the first draft of a script; all the work that may precede the first draft (identifying the topic;

generating, selecting and sequencing ideas, etc.) is claimed to belong to the pre-writing stage. However, the preparation of a written outline is so closely connected to drafting that it can be considered to be part of the writing stage.

An outline plays a crucial role in shaping the content and organisation of the script. It contains the ideas writers want to include and the specification of the order in which the ideas should be included. It usually consists of clearly formulated, brief and informative notes which do not have to be written up as full sentences. The outline presented in Figure 2.5 illustrates one possible way of organising some ideas relevant to the article task given in Figure 2.4 above.

Start
– *students like travelling with friends*
– *great to be away from school*
– *sometimes not easy to decide where to go*

How to travel?
  Bus better than train because:
– *freedom (go any place any time, stop whenever and where you want)*
– *can sing and have fun (there are no other passengers to disturb)*
– *safer (students are together not in different carriages)*
– *cheaper (?)*

Where to stay?
– *depends on the season (summer – camp; cold weather – hostel)*
– *not hotels, too expensive*
– *hostels and camps are interesting (you have a fridge in your room; share a tent/hut with friends; talk late at night, light a fire, stay up late)*

What to eat?
– *restaurant expensive*
– *can bring your own (share with others)*
– *go to supermarkets – lots of fun*
– *make your food together with friends – more fun, takes time*

Where to go?
– *depends why class takes a trip: for fun (better at the beginning of school) / to learn something*
– *go somewhere different from where you live*
– *be able to do interesting things*
– *learn about useful things*

End
– *think about all these and you will enjoy yourselves*

Figure 2.5 Sample article outline

The amount of planning varies depending on the type of text and the writing situation, but it is an essential stage in the writing process. Creating an outline for a letter of request or an article requires more time and more careful planning than for a letter to a friend for which a writer may only list the topics to be included. Given that the time available to complete the writing task is specified in language examinations, candidates should not be expected to produce elaborate outlines. Nevertheless, even a short outline with a few main ideas is worth writing because it serves as a useful guide that candidates can consult whenever necessary in the course of the writing stage.

The majority of students consider writing an outline a tiresome and useless activity, especially in the case of a test when they only have limited amount of time to compose a script. They fail to realise that by writing a short and clear outline they make writing less difficult. The outline acts as a checklist containing all the ideas that must be included in the script. This is especially important when the content points of the script are given in the task (as in the sample task in Figure 2.4). Following the outline as they write the script, writers make sure that they do not forget to include any content points. Furthermore, they can avoid digression and the inclusion of irrelevant ideas, which will result in incoherent scripts. Since it is always easier to spot problems concerning the organisation of ideas in the outline than in the script itself, those who write an outline in advance do not have to worry about where they should insert new ideas that they think of while writing the script so as to keep their script coherent. An outline also shows which ideas should be grouped together in one paragraph to divide the script into logical units. All of these uses of an outline make it possible for writers who work with an outline to concentrate during writing solely on how to write grammatically accurate, correctly punctuated and stylistically appropriate sentences, as a result of which they are more likely to produce better quality scripts.

It may happen that writers decide to modify their scripts at some point during the writing stage. They may want to move around, cut or elaborate particular parts of the script. Having an outline at hand, they can easily check whether the changes made to the script result in a more logical organisation of the ideas. Such changes can be made more easily to scripts that are word-processed. It is much easier to delete, cut and paste text in the word processor than on paper. Writers who are word processing their scripts can stop and read through what has been written and make changes by simple copy and paste commands. However, few language examinations make it possible as yet for candidates to write their scripts on computer, and it is not easy to effectively modify the final drafts of hand-written scripts. Therefore, it is better if students prepare an outline before they start to write the script: it decreases the chances that a short piece of writing written in an examination will need to be completely reorganised when the writer rereads the script in the reviewing stage.

The main aim of the writing stage is the transformation of the outline into a text. It is at this stage that the efforts invested in preparing the outline pay off. During this activity writers make decisions about how they will transform the ideas given in the outline in note format into full sentences. For this they have to think

first about what words they need to formulate and elaborate the ideas sketched out in the outline. At this point they may refer to a dictionary if they are allowed to use it. However, good writers do not stop and look up a word if they do not remember it but put down its equivalent in their first language and go on writing. They can return and replace the L1 word with its English equivalent when they remember it or have looked it up in the dictionary. Skilled writers also constantly keep in mind the audience to whom they are writing and they use stylistically appropriate words. This is usually easier when they write for a reader who they know very well and is more difficult if they have to write for a general audience.

The writer also needs to think of the grammatical structures necessary to build sentences. Good writers consciously try to alternate the length and structure of their sentences. Short sentences can be effective; however, a long series of short sentences results in a choppy text that does not read well (e.g. *Mary is my roommate. She is 17. She has green eyes. Her hair is black. She likes cats. We met this autumn.*). If consecutive sentences have different structures, the text has a more natural rhythm, so experienced writers focus on alternating sentence structure. They also try to avoid sentence fragments (e.g. *Although they want to know the answer.*), which are sentences that are incomplete, and do not write run-on sentences, which are too long and difficult to follow and therefore should be divided into several sentences.

The sentences that develop the same subtopic form one paragraph and the relationship between them may have to be marked overtly. Proficient writers use linking words to connect sentences, and in formal texts they avoid the use of co-ordinating conjunctions *(and, or, but, so)* to begin their sentences. They may choose to use co-ordinating conjunctions in the first draft but should change them in the reviewing stage. There are various cohesive devices (see Chapter 9) and the writers have to select from them the ones that are suitable for their purposes.

While drafting their texts, skilled writers also try to link their paragraphs. For this they can use linking words or write sentences that serve as a transition by summing up the previous paragraph and introducing the topic developed in the next. For instance, the sentence

> *The bus is not only more convenient than the train, but it is also safer,*

which can be the first sentence of a paragraph, has two functions. It introduces the topic of the paragraph and connects it to the previous one discussing why the bus is a more convenient means of transport than the train. Those candidates who know that they should use linking words but do it mechanically usually use *firstly, secondly, … finally* to introduce their paragraphs. The mechanical use of these words, however, does not necessarily make the text more coherent.

As can be seen, transforming the outline into a text is a complex and demanding activity that requires a lot of decision making and the use of a variety of language skills. Language learners writing in a second language find this task alone challenging enough. If they have to combine it with planning the content of their text, they may not be able to complete the task in time or may write a text that does not include all the content points, is incoherent, inaccurate, or

inappropriate. Considering the complexity of the task, it is natural that even proficient writers make errors when they write the first draft. They may not use the right word, may forget a verb, or may use a linking word that does not indicate the correct relationship between two ideas. A skilled writer can spot and correct many of these errors in the reviewing stage.

Reviewing

In the writing stage the primary concern of the writer is to write up the outline in the form of a continuous text. Once the text has been written, the writer rereads it to make sure that all the content planned for it has been included in the right order; to correct any spelling, punctuation or grammar mistakes; or to improve style and vocabulary.

It is important that writers review their texts by carefully reading what they have written. This, however, is a complex procedure and effective reviewing skills must be developed with regular practice. Writers should first read the script for content and organisation to check whether they have included all the necessary ideas in a logical order. When they have made sure that no important information has been omitted and that the ideas in the script flow smoothly, writers must consider the accuracy and the appropriacy of the language used to convey the ideas. In other words, they read the script to check if they have made any grammatical, spelling or punctuation mistakes, and whether their vocabulary is correct and suitable in style for the audience.

What makes reviewing problematic for writers is that they find it difficult to identify the shortcomings in their own scripts immediately after they have finished drafting it. In real life this problem can be solved with the help of time. When writers complete the first draft, they put it aside to let time pass between writing and reviewing. After one or two days they develop some distance to their texts simply because they do not remember it so well as when they finished it. Therefore, when they reread their texts, they may easily spot problems that they were unable to detect right after they finished writing.

In a classroom setting teachers can use peer revision in order to review scripts as soon as they are finished. Students swap scripts with their peers and thus read someone else's writing, often with the help of a set of questions compiled by their teachers in order to assist them. Peer revision is a useful activity for the development of reviewing skills.

In an examination situation, however, candidates have to employ other techniques, given that they only have a limited amount of time. They can read the script slowly, sentence by sentence, saying the sentences in their head. This way they can focus on individual sentences and also check whether two consecutive sentences are logically connected. They can write a short outline from their own script and compare it with the original outline they used to write the script to check whether the two are identical. If their script is short and time allows, they can read it several times, concentrating on one type of error each time. Since reading the script from the first sentence to the last is how a text is normally read,

candidates can create some distance to their scripts by reading them backwards one sentence at a time. This way they look at each sentence in isolation, irrespective of the sentences following and preceding it, and may spot mistakes more easily. All of the above are effective techniques for reviewing scripts in an examination, but they can only be employed if candidates have been trained to use them and set time aside for revision.

Factors that influence the writing process

As described in the previous section, the writing process consists of a number of stages and in each stage the writer has to pay attention to different aspects and elements of text composition, which change considerably with the task and the writing situation. Depending on the writing task, the work of the student changes with the amount of help built into the task. A writing task may simply have instructions given in a sentence:

(1) Describe your pet.
(2) Write a story that ends with the sentence *A friend in need is a friend indeed.*
(3) Write a composition with the title *Immigration: a necessary evil.*

Such tasks involve a longer pre-writing stage. Writers have to spend much more time on planning: they have to collect ideas in connection with the script, decide which ideas to exclude, and finally arrange the ideas to be included in a logical order. Such tasks are more time-consuming and require the writers to draw not only on their language skills but also on their creativity. Less creative writers will be disadvantaged by such a task in a situation when they have to write under time constraints.

Some other tasks, on the other hand, give the writer considerable help concerning the content of the script to be written. The article task (Figure 2.4) is a good example of this: it provides a ready-made outline that can be developed into a script without much planning. In some language examinations candidates have to read a few short texts on specific topics and then write their own script using the information from the texts they have read. Such tasks supply the ideas to write about, but it is the writer's duty to organise them coherently.

Depending on the writing situation, the writing process can be quite different. In a non-testing situation, when they are writing in the language class or at home, language learners have access to a number of resources. They may ask their peers, teachers or family members for ideas in connection with the set topic. They may use books to improve grammar, and dictionaries to find vocabulary items or to check spelling. Furthermore, especially when writing a script as a piece of homework, writers are not so pressed by time as in class or in an examination and can do more planning, writing and reviewing. Not having to work against time, writers can reorganise the content of their scripts several times and spend as much time on editing as they deem necessary. Scripts written under such conditions will probably be longer, better organised and more accurate.

In a language examination, however, writers must complete the task in a specified amount of time. They may not be able to spend as much time on the three stages of the writing process as they would in a non-testing situation. They usually have no access to other help than what is provided in the question paper. As a consequence, scripts written in examinations tend to be shorter and less developed, and this should be taken into account when assessing writing.

For the writing class

In order to teach writing, we must first develop an understanding of what constitutes this skill. Understanding writing skills results in more effective teaching and testing, as well as in the development of more astute course book evaluation skills: teachers knowledgeable about writing skills will have less difficulty in selecting course books that develop the skills necessary for writing.

Language teachers should make a conscious effort to have their students write and re-write whole texts on a variety of topics. They should give feedback in order to encourage students and help them to redraft their scripts effectively. They should teach their students various text types and through these text types familiarise them with the concept of purpose, content and audience. They should practise with their students reviewing techniques to equip them with skills for reading and evaluating their own scripts.

This discussion of the nature of writing and its features has direct implications for the language classroom that are listed below in the *Tips for the writing tutor* box.

👍 **Tips for the writing tutor**

- Use recently published language teaching course books, since they put higher emphasis on the development of writing skills and contain motivating and integrated writing tasks.
- As soon as their language skills allow students to create simple texts, give them tasks to write whole texts, for example notes, postcards and letters, not isolated sentences.
- Correct student compositions according to clear criteria. Use an analytic scale (see Chapter 7).
- Write comments on the students' texts in which you praise their strengths and highlight their weaknesses. Make your comments simple, clear and legible so that your students can understand them.
- Ask your students to redraft their texts on the basis of your comments and to submit them again for correction.
- Ask students to word-process longer pieces of writing. It is easier to redraft a text several times if it is available in electronic format.
- Discuss in the language class the differences between spoken and written language use.
- Practise the individual stages of the writing process in class.

- When reading a text in the course book (a letter, a leaflet, a story), ask students to identify the overall purpose of the text and who it is written for, and draw their attention to how the information in the text is organised. Reading good sample texts helps language learners to become better writers.
- Set writing tasks that ask the student to write to a range of readers (peers, pen-friends, teachers, institutions, etc.). Alternatively, you may set tasks in which the students write up the same information to different kinds of audiences.
- Set tasks in which students have to transform a formal text into an informal one and the other way round.
- Practise the identification of the text type, audience and content requirements of writing tasks: what kind of text students have to write, who they should write it for, and what information they should include in it.
- Practise preparing brief, clearly structured and formulated outlines with notes that the student can easily transform into a text.
- Practise developing into a paragraph one section of the outline.
- Practise joining the paragraphs and writing introductory and concluding sections for various text types.
- Draw students' attention to the fact that they <u>must</u> read their text after they have finished writing. First they must read to check if they have included all the ideas in a logical order. Then they must look for grammar, spelling, punctuation and style errors. When reading to check content, they should read the text from the first sentence to the last; and when they are reading for errors they should move from the last sentence to the first.
- Assign writing tasks not only as homework but also as in-class timed writing activities so that students become used to writing under time pressure.
- Practise with your students understanding the writing task. To do exactly what they are required to do, they must be able to identify the key words in the task. The key words reveal such crucial information as the text type *(write a <u>letter</u>, <u>article</u>, <u>short story</u>),* or the type of text the candidate is expected to write *(write a composition in which you <u>describe</u> your room:* description; *<u>tell</u> a funny story*: narration).

Summary

In this chapter we have seen that writing adds up to more than *grammar*. In writing language is used differently from speaking; therefore, students must become familiar with the characteristics of written English. Furthermore, they must understand the features and role of the elements of the writing context, and must learn what they have to do in the various stages of the writing process so as to produce a text. The writing process can be influenced by such factors as the type of task or the circumstances of writing. Teachers should therefore give their students different task types and provide opportunities for both timed and untimed writing.

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PART TWO
TASK TYPES AND TASK DEMANDS

Introduction

This part of the book contains four chapters. The first chapter focuses on task design and the remaining three chapters deal with text types that frequently occur in modern European language examinations.

The chapter on task design discusses the criteria that a good writing task must meet and gives guidelines for designing and field testing tasks. The chapter is suitable for analysing writing tasks in order to determine whether they are appropriate for examination practice or testing purposes. On its own, it is suitable for the assessment of writing tasks, and in combination with the other chapters in this part of the book it can be used to design writing tasks and rating schemes.

The chapters dealing with various letter types, articles and common composition types provide information on the function and purpose of these text types, on their layout, rhetorical organisation, content and style. In addition to summarising the key features of the discussed text types, the chapters highlight their problematic features and give useful practical advice for teachers.

The chapters contain sample tasks and student scripts that illustrate good performances or revised poor performances. Each script is followed by comments that can be useful for teaching. The sample tasks included in the body of each chapter can be used as practice tasks or assessment tasks in addition to the tasks provided at the end of each chapter, or at the end of each section on a particular subtype of text in the chapters dealing with letters and compositions.

Each chapter contains *Tips for the writer* boxes, which summarise those features of the discussed text types that students should pay attention to in both timed and untimed writing situations. The suggestions given in these boxes are the result of the field testing of the tasks.

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Chapter 3
Designing Tasks for Writing Skills Assessment

Aims

The aim of this chapter is to give help in evaluating and designing writing assessment tasks. The first part discusses the components of a writing task together with their characteristic features, and piloting, the procedure with which a writing task can be tested. The second part focuses on task design and the analysis and revision of writing tasks.

The writing assessment task

In order to be able to evaluate a writing assessment task, fix an existing but faulty one, or design a good one, we need to know the criteria that such a task must meet and how we can check whether it is a functioning task or not.

The components of a writing assessment task

The two basic parts that can be distinguished in an assessment task are the **rubric** and the **prompt**. Although they have separate functions, in some tasks the rubric and the prompt are combined into one coherent mix of instructions and stimuli for the candidates, so their elements are intermingled. However, in this chapter the elements that belong to the rubric and the prompt will be discussed separately.

The rubric
The rubric can contain information on what exactly the task will assess (e.g. *This is a test of your ability to write a coherent and grammatically correct argumentative composition* or *Your letter will be evaluated on the basis of content, expression, register, structure, and mechanics*), on how the candidates should go about completing the writing task (e.g. *Write the answers on the answer sheet*), on the time given for the completion of the task, on the word limit set for the task, or on how the task is marked (e.g. *Task 1 carries more weight in marking than Task 2*). Its function is therefore to give procedural information.

The two pieces of information that must be given in the rubric are the time allotted for the completion of the task and the amount of text, usually expressed in number of words, that test takers are required to produce. Test takers need to know how much time is given to do the task and how many words they have to write if they are to plan, write and hopefully revise their script successfully.

A rubric must provide all the information that is necessary for the candidates to understand what they have to do. However, this is not to be interpreted as meaning the longer the rubric the better. A task intended for the assessment of writing ability must not turn into a major reading activity; therefore, the rubric should be as short as clarity allows.

Furthermore, the rubric must be carefully worded to make sure that it is

understandable. The language used may be the candidate's mother tongue, but in modern European examinations the rubric is usually written in the same language as the candidate is tested on. Therefore, the rubric must be written in simple language and the information presented in it must be logically organised and ordered.

The prompt

The exact nature and content of the script candidates are expected to compose are specified in the prompt. The prompt is the stimulus in response to which candidates write the script, so it must be understandable, rich, motivating and encouraging. The function of the prompt is to provide information about the context, content, and purpose of writing.

Prompt formats

There are three basic prompt formats. The **base prompt** is short and formulates the whole task in one or two sentences. Most one-sentence composition prompts are base prompts (Figure 3.1).

> *Do you agree or disagree with the opinion that men make poorer teachers than women? Why?*

Figure 3.1 Example of a base prompt

Such a prompt sets the topic and may specify the main rhetorical mode of the expected script; however, it does not provide information about the writing context and the exact content to be developed. It most resembles writing tasks set by language teachers who want to check whether their students can apply their knowledge about a particular grammar point in practice or whether they have learnt certain vocabulary items.

The **framed prompt** on the contrary is longer and helps candidates to interpret the task by placing it into a richer context. It usually describes a situation from which candidates can understand who they are, why they are writing, what they are writing about, and who will read their texts (Figure 3.2).

> *Your school is planning to start an English language school magazine and has asked students to write articles with the title "Thoughts about my school". You have decided to write an article in which you describe what you like and dislike about your school and explain your reasons.*

Figure 3.2 Example of a framed prompt

The contexts described in such prompts present contexts familiar to test takers or contexts that they can imagine themselves in. They are therefore modelled on real-life situations and are much preferred by task designers since life is an inexhaustible source of authentic situations in which writing occurs.

The last type of prompt is the **text-based prompt** and it may include one or more

texts of varying length (Figure 3.3) to which candidates respond (e.g. a letter, an advertisement, brochures), ideas which they are expected to incorporate into their scripts (e.g. notes prepared for an article, or a list of ideas jotted down to be included in a letter), or visual information presented in the form of images (e.g. a sequence of pictures presenting a humorous incident). In some writing books the tasks that require the writer to compose a text in response to such stimuli are called transactional writing tasks. Text-based prompts are frequently used to test writing skills because they allow the creation of a large variety of stimulating lifelike writing tasks.

Browsing on the World Wide Web, you found the following advertisement in an online student magazine.

> **A Special Youth Summer Place in Canada for a Special Kid!**
>
> Ekocamp brings together young people from around the world in a unique and well-protected environment.
>
> • Learn new skills
> • Meet new people from around the world and make wonderful friendships
> • Learn to be a team player
> • Gain self-confidence and become independent
> • Learn French or English
> • Have fun in a relaxed and secure environment
> • Visit Ottawa, the Canadian capital, and two other interesting cities, Montreal and Québec City.
>
> If you would like more information please email <u>Ekocamp</u>.

Write an e-mail to the director of the camp, Louis Wnuk, in which

• *you introduce yourself*

and enquire about

• *the cost of the camp*
• *the age of the young people they receive*
• *the activities (swimming, kayaking, horse riding)*
• *any printed information about the camp*
• *the possibility to travel with parents*

Figure 3.3 Example of a text-based prompt

Candidates attempting this task are provided with a situation in which they play a particular role and have a specific task to complete, and a text, the advertisement, in response to which they have to write the e-mail message.

The text-based prompt varies according to the form of input. The type of text presented as input may be, for instance, a job advertisement with or without notes given in bullet point format to which the test taker responds; two advertisements about the same kind of product which can be used to compare the advertised products and help a friend choose the better one; a diary entry on the basis of which the test taker tells a story or describes a person or a place; notes on a letter or excerpts from one or more letters that are to be used to compose a reply letter; a brief news report in response to which the test taker should write a letter to the editor; an announcement for an article or essay competition to which the test taker responds; an entry from a guide book to restaurants and a series of notes recording personal experiences in connection with the restaurant that can be used to write an assessment report on the restaurant; and many other similar types of input taken from real life.

The input may also consist of a text together with information presented in non-textual form. For example, an excerpt from a letter and data presented in a table can be used to write a letter (e.g. giving information to a friend about local train and bus services that are not available on the Internet). A short newspaper article together with a diagram and some notes can be used as input for a letter or a report. Some notes and a map can serve as input for a letter in which the test taker must give directions for a friend going to a party.

Some tasks contain only pictures or charts, graphs, or diagrams as input. A series of pictures arranged in a sequence may be suitable for the elicitation of a narrative; two similar pictures can be used as input for a comparison and contrast essay; a diagram can be used in a process description task. The advantage of tasks whose input is given in non-textual form is that candidates cannot lift phrases or even longer stretches of text as they often can do when the input is text.

These three prompt types represent tasks of varying difficulty levels. A base type one-line-prompt requires more effort from candidates than framed or text-based prompts, which give a detailed description of the writing situation. In the case of a one-line-prompt candidates must invent an audience, generate and organise ideas, and may have to establish the purpose of writing. They therefore must invest considerably more time and energy in planning the script than in the case of a framed or text-based prompt that already gives them the ideas that they have to include in their scripts, as well as a reader and a purpose for writing.

The characteristic features of prompts

The **layout** of the prompt influences the difficulty of the writing task. It is more difficult to process a complex prompt that gives all the information in the form of a continuous text (Figure 3.4).

> Your school has an English language student magazine and you want to write an article for it about what makes a good class trip. Write an article of 180 words about the advantages and disadvantages of the possible means of travelling, types of accommodation, food that you can eat, and possible destinations. Give reasons why you think one is better than the other.

Figure 3.4 Prompt presented in continuous text format

Candidates are less likely to miss crucial information if the prompt is organised so that the most important pieces of information are set apart from the body of the prompt, for example in the form of a bulleted list (Figure 3.5). Key information can also be highlighted if it is printed in bold letters.

> Your school has an English language student magazine and you want to write an **article** for it about what makes a good class trip. Look at the notes below and write about the different possibilities. Give reasons why you think one is better than the other.
>
> • How to travel? (Train? Hire a bus?)
> • Where to stay? (Camp site? Hotel?)
> • What to eat? (Fast-food? Food taken from home?)
> • Where to go? (Mountains? Towns?)
>
> Write an article of about **180 words** in an appropriate style on the opposite page. Use the title *Tips for a good class trip.*

Figure 3.5 Task with content points presented in bullet point format

Candidates presented with the version of the task in which the content points are bulleted are less likely to miss information necessary for the successful completion of the task. The layout allows for the use of the task as a checklist on which the content points covered can be ticked off. The basic rule that task designers or evaluators should observe is that the more complex a task is, the clearer its layout must be.

The **form** of the input given in the task can also influence the difficulty of the task. The input can be provided in textual, visual, aural and printed or electronic form. Before starting to write their scripts, candidates may have to read other texts, sequence images or consult tables and graphs, or listen to texts and take notes that they can use in drafting their script. A lot of textual or aural input can burden the candidates unnecessarily with additional reading or listening comprehension tasks. Furthermore, if candidates are given long texts in the input, it is more likely that they will lift chunks or whole sentences from the input and include them in their scripts.

As in the case of the rubric, the **language** of the prompt may be the first language of the candidates. However, in most examinations administered internationally the prompt is in the language on which the candidates are tested. Consequently, a good prompt is written in simple and carefully composed sentences that are easy to process and which give equal opportunity for all the candidates to understand the task.

Taking all of the above-described features of rubrics and prompts into consideration, it is perhaps obvious why it is not normal practice to allow candidates a choice of different writing tasks within one examination paper. Some candidates will be disadvantaged if test takers are allowed to select writing assessment tasks that have different rubrics and whose prompts have different

format, layout, form of input and type of content, or language. Two tasks that differ only in the topic to be discussed may well be of different difficulty level, and the candidates selecting the more difficult topic will be at a disadvantage compared to those who attempt the task with the easier topic. If a choice of writing tasks must be offered, what the task designer must do is try to offer a choice of equally difficult topics that have to be written up as the same text type (genre).

The criteria that a prompt must meet

Irrespective of the type of prompt, a good prompt meets certain criteria. Generally speaking, a good prompt provides a clear description of the writing context and contains carefully selected input materials. In terms of the writing context, the prompt defines clearly the **situation**, the **participants** in the act of communication, the **topic** and **purpose** of writing, and the kind of **text type** to be produced.

The **situation** described in the writing assessment task should ideally be as similar to a real-life situation as possible. A real-life situation is likely to be meaningful and candidates should be able to understand it easily. If the situation presented in the task is one that the candidates would not have to cope with in real life or that makes no sense, candidates will have difficulty in solving the task. For instance, the situation described in the task presented in Figure 3.6 is not relevant to teenagers' everyday realities.

Your local government is planning to introduce village tourism in the region where you live. Some villagers are for, some others are against the idea. Comment on the issue in your local newspaper in the "Readers' letters" column.

Figure 3.6 Task presenting a situation teenagers would find difficult to relate to

First of all, teenagers are likely to find it strange that they have to comment on an issue that is alien to them. Even if they were given guidelines concerning the ideas they should elaborate, they would find it difficult to address this topic. Furthermore, it is unnatural that a teenager would publish an article in English for speakers of their mother tongue.

The prompt also defines clearly the **participants** in the act of communication. It must be clear to the candidates who the writer is because they have to assume the role of that person. It is better if in an examination the candidates are put into situations where they do not have to pretend to be someone else, since this may require creativity or other skills that are not language skills and can easily put some candidates at a disadvantage. If candidates do have to assume an imaginary role, it must be described in such detail that candidates can easily put themselves in the position of the imaginary writer.

Candidates also need to understand who they are writing to. The prompt, therefore, must contain clear information about the audience. This is important because the tone and the level of formality candidates have to adopt in the script and often the amount, nature and explicitness of the information they include in

the script depend on their understanding of the relationship between the writer and the reader.

The **topic** that the candidates are required to address in their scripts must not be completely unfamiliar to them and it must be interesting. Candidates must have something to say about the topic and should be motivated to deal with it, otherwise they will not be able to produce enough language to demonstrate their knowledge and as a consequence will be unfairly tested. The difficulty level of the writing task varies if the topic is simple *(Describe what you do on Friday afternoons)* or complex *(Compare bean coffee and instant coffee)*, concrete *(Tell a funny family story)* or abstract *(Define happiness)*, impersonal *(The ways people lie)* or personal *(What is your attitude to white lies?)*, unfamiliar *(Describe the Oval Office)* or familiar *(Describe your living room)*.

Those candidates who are not familiar with the topic will spend more time on generating ideas than others. In an examination that measures general language skills candidates should not be disadvantaged because they are not familiar with a particular topic. They should not be tested on background knowledge because the focus of the test is on how candidates can handle language and not on what kind of content knowledge (e.g. cultural, scientific) they can demonstrate in writing. The topic given in the writing task must be interesting and motivating.

Candidates also need to be given a real **purpose** for writing. Writing with a purpose is always easier because it gives help in the organisation and ordering of ideas, sets a direction for the writer, and provides a clear goal to be achieved. If candidates are presented with a clearly defined problem, they are more likely to be motivated to solve it and to compose a coherent script that has a function.

Closely related to the notion of purpose is that of **text type**. The prompt must state clearly what text type or genre the candidates are expected to produce. Knowing the text type helps candidates to organise their ideas so that they can be fitted into and are appropriate for the rhetorical structure of the required text type. Some prompts go beyond the specification of the text type: they also describe the rhetorical structure characteristic of the text type the candidates must write. The writing task in Figure 3.7, for instance, provides this kind of additional information.

An international students' e-magazine has started a competition. Teenagers from all over the world are encouraged to send in 200-word-long articles with the title "What the Internet is for". The best ten articles will be published in the magazine, and the first three teenagers can spend two weeks in a country of their own choice. You have decided to write an article.

Start your article by outlining what you want to discuss, then describe the advantages of the Internet, the disadvantages of the Internet, and finally give your opinion at the end of the article.

Figure 3.7 Task describing the rhetorical structure of the expected text

The rhetorical structure given in the prompt is the rhetorical structure of the for-and-against composition. The candidate writing this task should have little difficulty in organising the information in the script because the organisational

pattern is given in the task. Teachers using or designing a task that describes in the prompt the rhetorical structure of the text type make the writer's task easier.

Candidates can only be expected to write standard text types such as letters, compositions or articles. In order to assess their general writing ability, they should not be given tasks for which too much creativity and creative writing skills must be used. An example of such a task is the following:

> *You wake up in a candle-lit empty room that has no windows. You don't know how, when, or why you got there. Describe your feelings.*

By using the criteria described in this chapter, teachers can evaluate a writing assessment task to see whether they can use it in its original form or it needs to be improved. Moreover, they can use the same criteria if they have designed a writing task themselves and would like to check whether it meets the requirements of a good writing assessment task. The considerations in this chapter can be encapsulated in a checklist similar to the one shown in Figure 3.8 that incorporates the basic features of the rubric and the prompt.

	YES	NO
Is the rubric short, clear and comprehensive?		
Is the time for the completion of the task given?		
Is the expected length of the script given?		
Is the prompt easy to interpret?		
Is the language simple and clear?		
Does the layout help understanding the task?		
Are the key pieces of information highlighted in the task?		
Are the instructions stated clearly?		
Are the instructions laid out clearly?		
Is the amount of input appropriate?		
Is the input understandable?		
Is the input organised and presented logically?		
Is the task relevant for the candidates?		
Is the writing situation lifelike?		
Is it clear who the writer is?		
Is it clear who the reader is?		
Is the purpose for writing clear?		
Is the topic relevant and accessible for all the candidates?		
Is the text type expected specified?		
Is the writer expected to be highly creative?		

Figure 3.8 Checklist for identifying problems with a writing assessment task

For an ideal task all the ticks except for the last question should be in the *Yes* column of the checklist. However, depending on the purposes for which the

writing task is intended, teachers may decide to use a task that also has a few ticks in the *No* column. In an examination, where candidates must interpret the task without any additional help than what is given in the paper, the writing task should meet all the criteria of the checklist, except for the last one.

For further information on item writing refer to Appendix 1.

Piloting: Testing the assessment task

In order to make sure that a writing assessment task is appropriate for classroom assessment or examination preparation, teachers should evaluate and test it before using it. First, they should evaluate it with the help of a checklist like the one given in Figure 3.8. By going through the checklist systematically, they can check how many of the requirements the task meets. If they find that the task falls short of the requirements, they may choose to fix it if the problem is only a minor one or they may look for another task.

When they have selected a task that passes the checklist test, teachers should proceed to the next stage and respond to the task themselves or ask their colleagues to respond to it whilst observing the time and word limit given. By writing their own script, it is expected that teachers will follow the same process as the candidates are expected to follow and thus should be able to notice if there is something wrong with the task. In doing this they can also check whether the task is realistic in terms of the time allowed for its completion, and whether the topic can be developed and elaborated in the number of words given in the specified time.

Another advantage of teachers themselves responding to the task is that they will develop a better understanding of what aspects of the topic can be included in the task and what kind of vocabulary is needed. It will also become clear what kind of grammatical structures are required or suitable to complete the task. Thus the teacher will also have a better understanding of what can be expected from candidates in terms of grammar. The information gathered about vocabulary and grammar can be used to evaluate the rating scheme accompanying the writing task. In case no rating scheme is available, the teacher can create one and thus ensure that the candidates' vocabulary and grammatical performance are measured against realistic expectations.

However, the teacher may not be the ideal person to use to test the timing or the relevance and accessibility of the topic. Teachers are more proficient language users than their students and can discuss a wider variety of topics. Therefore, having written their own script, teachers should also give the task to a few students who have the same characteristics (language knowledge, general knowledge, age, etc.) as the candidates who are going to be tested with the task. These may be students from another class or from another school.

Once the students have completed the task, the teacher should discuss the experience with them and ask questions related to the task. These discussions can reveal shortcomings of the task that the teacher did not notice. Crucially, the teacher should read the scripts produced by the students because they will also contain useful information about the task. For instance, if all the students have

missed a content point, it may be that the instructions referring to the content of the expected script are not as clear as they should be.

Going through this procedure, which is generally referred to as piloting or trialling, is time-consuming but very much worth the effort. It saves a lot of frustration, time and energy for both the teacher and those language learners who attempt the task. Over time teachers will be able to compile a collection of good writing assessment tasks and will not have to go through this complex procedure every time they want to use a writing task.

Such a disciplined approach to testing a writing task is especially important in the case of exam preparation because this is the stage when the would-be candidates become familiar with the expectations and format of the examination they are about to take. Faulty examples can easily misinform the candidates and this may disadvantage them in the examination.

Designing a writing assessment task

When designing a writing task, teachers must first of all clarify what specific aspects of the learners' writing ability they want to test and then decide what kind of task is best for testing those aspects. For instance, if the teacher wants to test students' ability to write developed paragraphs that are sequenced logically, assigning a note-writing task would not be suitable. A note is to the point and consists of a few short sentences that may not form one paragraph. The teacher would not learn much from scripts written on a note task about the students' paragraph-developing and sequencing skills.

When teachers design a new task, they should follow the steps discussed in detail in the previous section. The following is a summary of these steps: Teachers first design a task that meets the criteria of a good writing task. Following this, they pre-test it by writing it themselves, asking some of their colleagues to write it, or by administering it to students from another class or from another school. This way they can collect a variety of opinions about the task, and on the basis of these opinions can decide whether the task is appropriate, needs minor improvements, or is to be completely redesigned. In case it only needs to be modified slightly, the teacher may decide to administer the modified version to students without any further pre-testing. However, if the task has to be redesigned, it must be piloted again.

Analysing and improving writing assessment tasks
When choosing a writing task for classroom practice or for home assignment, it is not a serious problem if the task does not meet all the requirements of a good writing task. The teacher can always discuss the task with the students, and by answering all the questions (e.g. *Who is the audience? What is the expected length?*) solve the problems that come up as a result of the deficiencies of a task. However, when the teacher wants to use a task for assessment purposes, the task must meet the criteria of a good writing assessment task. A faulty assessment task will confuse students and fail to show the writers' language skills.

In what follows, we will examine a number of faulty writing tasks and see how they can be improved, following the above criteria and principles.

The first task consists of a **base prompt** and a short rubric (Figure 3.9).

> *Life in New York is dangerous.*
> *Write between 200 and 250 words.*

Figure 3.9 Task with base prompt

The rubric is short and does not give all the information necessary for the test taker. Although the length of the script to be produced is given, candidates do not know how much time they have for writing. Time is a crucial factor in any examination situation, but it is especially important in the case of a task like this where test takers must first narrow the topic by selecting the aspects they wish to develop and then must generate all the ideas for the script before they can start writing.

The test taker may have problems with the topic itself. Topics that are likely to cause difficulties are those that are emotionally loaded or upsetting *(How would you react if someone committed suicide in your family?),* embarrassing *(Describe your weaknesses),* or technical in nature and require specialised knowledge *(The itinerary of an e-mail message),* or those that draw excessively on creativity. New York is a large city, so candidates familiar with the sources of danger in large cities can use their knowledge when writing about the given topic. Nevertheless, specifying a city which not all the test takers are equally familiar with may disadvantage those test takers who interpret the prompt literally yet lack the knowledge or experience that would allow them to write about the dangers typical of it.

There are other aspects of this prompt that are difficult to interpret. Test takers are not told what text type they are expected to produce. They can guess that it is some kind of composition or essay, but since they do not know why they must write about this topic, they may describe New York, tell a story about a friend who spent some time there and was mugged, or list the sources of danger characteristic of the city. Besides description and narration some test takers might decide to argue with the statement. Therefore, the scripts produced may be so varied that the assessor cannot use one single rating scheme to evaluate them.

The prompt does not specify the purpose for writing. Is the purpose of the essay entitled *The dangers of New York* to inform visitors, to dissuade travellers who are thinking to travel there, to make an inventory of the possible dangers, or something else? If test takers are not told why they should write a piece of text, they must find a reason for themselves. This, however, may be time-consuming, and may not meet the expectations of the examiner.

Even if the test takers guess that they have to write an essay and think of a particular purpose for writing, they are not given instructions about the title. The most likely result would be that they forget to invent a title. A good essay title, however, is more than a text type constituent. It helps the writer directly to focus on the discourse mode and the topic and indirectly to create a unified text. The

title *The beauty spots of my town,* for instance, indicates that the candidate must write a description and that the essay must contain the description of nice places in one particular town.

The audience is not given in the prompt, yet writing for an unknown reader poses a variety of problems for test takers. Style is a problem that is relevant in the case of a language examination of all levels: test takers must know whether they have to write formally or informally. At higher levels the content, the ideas included in the script, becomes another important audience-related issue. Test takers must know who they are writing to in order to be able to decide what kind of ideas to include in the script and how explicit they must be. For example, the reader who knows more about the topic set in the prompt needs less explanation and details than a reader who is not familiar with it.

An improved version of the writing task on New York is presented in Figure 3.10. This version of the task specifies both the time available for the completion of the task and the expected length of the script. Furthermore, the text type is also given (exposition) together with a title, and the topic has been modified. Instead of a particular city, the test taker can think about and write about any big city. The audience is also specified and so is implicitly the reason for writing: writing an essay for the teacher serves to demonstrate knowledge and is a typical writing situation for a language learner. The short original writing task has become more understandable with the addition of a few important pieces of information. The revised task mixes the elements of the rubric and the prompt and is short yet comprehensive enough to provide test takers with logically organised and clearly laid out information.

You should spend about **40 minutes** on this task.

Write an essay with the title *The dangers of living in a big city* for your teacher in which you explain what dangers people living in big cities face day-by-day.

Write between **200 and 250 words**.

Figure 3.10 An improved version of the writing task with base prompt

The second writing assessment task consists of a **framed prompt** which includes the description of a situation and a list of ideas in bullet point format (Figure 3.11). The situation is intended to help test takers to understand the writing task, and the bullet points indicate the subtopics that must be included in the scripts.

If the criteria of a good writing assessment task are applied to this task, it becomes clear that it needs to be improved. The rubric is missing. Information is not given on either the time available for writing or the length of the script. The test takers must write a letter; however, no information is available to them whether they should invent an address and include it in the letter together with a date or not.

You have recently come home from an English-speaking country. Write to your host family. Include the following points:

- *thank for hosting you*
- *how food is different at home*
- *customs you liked*
- *events you particularly enjoyed*

Figure 3.11 Task with framed prompt

The prompt also needs to be redrafted. The situation must be elaborated with the addition of a few details that can help test takers to understand who they are, why they are writing, what they are writing, and who they are writing to. The biggest problem of these four features of the task is the audience. The prompt does not give any information about the readers other than they are the host family. Some of the questions that may come up are *How many people are meant by host family? What is their age? What is the writer's relationship with them? Which member of the family is the letter written to?* or *What tone should be adopted?* Test takers must therefore invent a family, decide who they write the letter to and think of a name for the correspondent. The undefined reader will most probably cause style problems for those test takers who fail to do this

The lack of detail in the description of the situation may result in letters that are artificial and that lack the flavour of letters written for genuine communication purposes. Such letters are usually written as if the reader were expected to be aware of the task: they do not have an introduction or a closing sentence, and the subtopics are drearily dealt with one-by-one without any attempt to add original ideas or connect ideas into a coherent text that reads naturally.

Two of the content points also need to be revised. The first one is acceptable as it formulates the reason for writing and this is the piece of information that is included early in a letter. It could, however, be preceded by a few words on the journey home and the arrival. The second content point is also acceptable because after a long time away from home food is something most people miss, and it is natural if they discuss it. Furthermore, the wording of the prompt makes possible the description of local foods and the avoidance of having to mention English foods, which may cause difficulties for test takers who do not know much about English cuisine. However, neither of the last two content points is acceptable. The first one presupposes background knowledge about the culture of an English-speaking country and can disadvantage those test takers who do not have this kind of knowledge. Since the task is intended to test language skills, this content is not suitable for the task. The last content point draws more on creativity than language skills because it forces test takers to invent unspecified events that they enjoyed in a foreign country. The last two content points must therefore be rewritten or replaced so as to ensure that the writers do not fail because they lack the specialised knowledge, experience or creativity to solve the task.

The revised version of the task (Figure 3.12) presents improvements that meet the basic requirements for a rubric and that enhance the prompt by enriching the situation with details that help test takers assume the role of the writer specified in the task, by clarifying the relationship between the writer and the readers, and by the inclusion of content points that do not require special background knowledge.

The rubric gives clear instructions concerning the time allowed for the completion of the task, the expected length of the script, the address and the date. The situation is described in more detail: the *host family* was replaced by the more precise and informative *elderly couple*. Moreover, it is explicitly stated that the script to be produced must be a letter. The surname by which the family can be addressed is given in the salutation.

You have recently come home from an English-speaking country where you studied English and lived with a nice elderly couple. Write a **letter** to your host family in which you:

- *tell them about the trip home*
- *thank them for hosting you*
- *describe how your family welcomed you and*
- *say what it feels like to be home (food, friends, own room)*

Write your letter in the space below in about **45 minutes** using no more than **150-200 words**. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Mr and Mrs Brown,

_____
_____
_____
_____

Figure 3.12 The revised version of the task with framed prompt

The last two content points have also been improved. Although the first of the two still requires some creativity from test takers, it is considerably easier for them to think of a situation when they arrived home from a trip or a camp and include it in the letter than write about events that they participated in and enjoyed in an unknown environment. Similarly, describing what it feels like to be back home should not be difficult to elaborate on partly because it is something people experience every time they leave their home environment, and partly because

additional help is given in parentheses in the form of hints for possible ways in which this last content point can be developed.

The final writing assessment task discussed in this chapter consists of a rubric and a **text-based prompt** combined with pictures (Figure 3.13). The text-based prompt presents the input in the form of several texts (a letter and five lists of information on the houses) of varying length that the test taker must read and use to write the task. The role of the input is to give the test taker ideas that they can include in their script and to help them place themselves into a situation in which they would find it natural to write the required text.

Your friend, who lives in London, would like to move to the countryside. He has information about houses from a newspaper ad, but cannot decide which one to choose and so asks for your advice. Please write him a reply (approx. 200 words) stating arguments for 1-2 properties, also explain your arguments against the others. Here is the letter you received.

Dear Richard,

I hope you are well. This is just a short note to ask for your help.

We've finally decided to move outside London, however it's very difficult for us to choose a new home. You know with 3 children (Sharon 4, Ann 9, David 15), you need to think twice before you move. Sarah and I will continue working in London of course. As we lack the time and expertise to look after a garden, this makes our decision even harder. What's more, we need a guest-room in case family members and friends pay a visit.

Please have a look at my enclosed notes about the possible properties and say what you think. We hope you are all well.

Regards,
John

	Camelford property	
	Reception Rooms: 1 **Bedrooms:** 2 **Bathrooms:** 2 **Type of Property:** Flat	**Central Heating:** Electric **Parking Facilities:** Off Street **Gardens:** Front & Rear **Near Shops:** Yes **Near School:** Yes **Price:** £195,000
	Barry property	
	Reception Rooms: 1 **Bedrooms:** 4 **Bathrooms:** 2 **Type of Property:** Semi-Detached	**Central Heating:** Oil **Parking Facilities:** Garage **Gardens:** Front & Rear **Near Shops:** Yes **Near School:** Yes **Price:** £249,950
	Wallingford property	
	Reception Rooms: 2 **Bedrooms:** 3 **Bathrooms:** 1 **Type of Property:** Detached	**Central Heating:** Gas **Parking Facilities:** On Street **Gardens:** Front & Rear **Double Glazed:** Yes **Near Shops:** Yes **Near School:** Yes **Price:** £315,000
	Kent property	
	Reception Rooms: 3 **Bedrooms:** 5 **Bathrooms:** 2 **Type of Property:** Detached	**Central Heating:** Gas **Burglar Alarm:** Yes **Parking Facilities:** Double Garage **Gardens:** Front & Rear **Near Shops:** Yes **Near School:** Yes **Price:** £419,995
	Walderslade property	
	Reception Rooms: 1 **Bedrooms:** 3 **Bathrooms:** 2 **Type of Property:** Semi-Detached	**Central Heating:** Gas **Parking Facilities:** Garage **Gardens:** Front & Rear **Near Shops:** Yes **Near School:** Yes **Price:** £127,995

Figure 3.13 Task with combined text-based and picture input

This task fails to meet several of the criteria of a good writing assessment task. The rubric is incomplete and the task description and the input are overwhelming. The length of the script is specified, and it would make the evaluation of the task more objective if the time for its completion was also available. The writer has a large amount of information to process before writing the script, and some of the information is incomplete or inappropriate.

In order to produce a script that meets the requirements of the task, the writer must combine information included in the instructions, the letter and the notes on the houses. For instance, the number of children given in the letter must be related to the number of bedrooms available in the five houses. Similarly, the friend's gardening experience and the types and number of gardens that come with the houses must also be taken in consideration. The problem is not only the large number of content points emerging from the prompt and the letter that must be fitted into 200 words, but the nature of the abilities that a successful completion of the task requires. Combining the information given throughout the task with the assumed specialised knowledge about housing is not primarily a language skill and certainly not a writing skill that could be measured in a language examination.

The situation described in the task is unrealistic for school-age test takers. The writers can only be males (called Richard) or have to assume the role of a male and should have considerable expertise concerning houses and flats. Furthermore, they should be able to understand the problems of a family with three children who are not particularly good at gardening and should be able to take these problems into consideration when they give advice to their friend.

The instructions are unclear and show that the task was not piloted as carefully as it could have been. Test takers are told to present arguments for one **or** two properties, so while some test takers choose to argue for two houses, others will only argue for one. However, offering such options may not meet the expectations of the examiner. Arguing for two houses means, for instance, that the writer must produce more language and handle and organise more ideas within the script. It would be difficult to evaluate two scripts with the same set of criteria if their content were incomparable.

Test takers are also instructed to say why they disfavour the remaining three or four houses. This is an unrealistic expectation in a script whose length is set at 200 words. If test takers must address so many different subtopics, they cannot develop any of them and as a result they may well compose a script that reads like a list.

Moreover, test takers are expected to imagine themselves in an inadequately described and unrealistic situation and perform a task that cannot be completed within the specified word limit. In comparison with the script to be produced, the amount of information that must be processed is an unrealistic expectation. The task cannot be used in this form for assessment purposes.

The task presented in Figure 3.14 is a modified version of this poorly designed writing assessment task. Test takers are given the time they may take over the task and the expected length of their scripts. They must imagine a situation which is probable and in which the participants, the relationship between them, the reason why they communicate in writing, and the reason for writing the letter are clearly defined, plausible and natural.

The abbreviated form of the pen-friend's name is identical for both females and males, so in the salutation the use of the forward slash can be avoided (*Dear Philip/Philippa → Dear Phil*). The letter input has been removed, and the number of houses has been reduced to two. The information about the houses has also been

tailored to the time and length requirements, and is displayed in a table to make it easier to interpret. The layout of the pictures and the organisation of the information in the table is identical (house first and flat second) to avoid confusion.

You and your pen-friend from Greece (Philip/Philippa) will spend three weeks next summer in England. You will learn English at a language school in Hastings and can stay in a detached house outside the city or in a flat in the city. The rent is almost the same for either the house or the flat, so your parents have decided to let you choose. Write a letter to your friend and say whether you would like to stay in the house or in the flat. Give reasons for your choice. Use the information from the brochure the school sent you.

Detached house   **Flat**

	Detached House	Flat
Living Rooms	1	1
Bedrooms	3	2
Bathrooms	1	2
Gardens	Front & Rear	Front
Distance from school	6 km	2 km

take the local bus   *walk*

Write your **letter** in the space below in 45 minutes using no more than **200 words**. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Phil,

_____

_____

_____

Figure 3.14 The revised version of the task with combined text-based and picture input

The pictures could be removed because there is enough information provided in the table to give ideas for the writer. However, the additional visual stimulus may give ideas for less creative test takers. For instance, comparing the picture featuring the detached house standing alone in the middle of a green garden with the picture of the building with flats neatly arranged under one roof, test takers may think of advantages and disadvantages in terms of giving a party or having their friends over to their house or flat, studying in the garden, or meeting and chatting with next door neighbours to practise their English.

Concluding remarks

Teachers who design or revise writing assessment tasks should first be familiar with the criteria of a good writing assessment task. They should know the function and characteristic features of the rubric and the various types of prompts. Novice writers of lower language ability must be given tasks with detailed prompts (framed or text-based prompts) because their main problem is that they only have limited language resources. Unlike the more proficient users of a foreign language who have better writing skills, they should not be expected to generate content or to spend their time on planning. Therefore, they must be assisted by providing well-organised and sufficient input for the content of the script they produce.

More proficient users of a language, who enjoy more freedom as a result of their greater language resources, can be provided with less input. They can be expected to generate ideas of their own and sequence them logically in their scripts. Such test takers can attempt tasks with a base prompt.

Teachers designing writing assessment tasks should pilot their tasks. Piloting is a complex yet indispensable part of the designing process that provides teachers with essential information about the task. The result of the designing process is not only a writing assessment task suitable for testing purposes. Teachers who develop a thorough understanding of the elements of a task and how these elements work can provide more help for their students preparing for language examinations and they themselves should become better raters.

However, familiarity with the criteria of a good writing task and the stages that the designing process includes is not enough. Teachers wishing to test their students' writing skills must also develop a basic understanding of the characteristic features of various text types. The following chapters discuss the most common text types that occur in modern European examinations.

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Chapter 4
Letter

General characteristics of the text type

The letter is a piece of writing frequently used for teaching and testing language skills. In language examinations letter tasks simulate the circumstances in which people turn to this means of communication in everyday life: for instance, candidates reply to a letter given in the task the same way they would reply in real life to a letter sent to them by a friend or an official body. As a consequence, the addressees (the people/organisations to whom letters are written) and reasons for writing in such tasks are truly diverse, so the candidate must be prepared to write letters of different formality levels (e.g. informal, semi-formal, formal), with the appropriate layout (e.g. date under the sender's address in the top right hand corner of a formal letter), for a variety of purposes (e.g. asking or giving information), and on a wide range of topics.

Formal letters are written to individuals representing official bodies, companies or organisations, to people who the writer does not know personally or does not know well. Such letters are about issues which are not personal and are written in order to get something done. The purpose for writing varies according to what the writer wants to achieve: to order a service, to apply for a job, to request information, to complain about something, to raise an issue in a magazine, etc. What the writer achieves with such letters is to get the required service, have a job interview, obtain the needed information, get a refund, or draw the attention of the readers of a magazine to a particular issue.

In teaching materials letter types are distinguished and labelled depending on the purpose for writing. Thus, for instance, the letter in which writers ask for further information about an advertised service is called a *letter of request;* the letter they compose in order to get a summer job is called an *application letter;* and the letter in which they express dissatisfaction is called a *letter of complaint.*

Formal letters are usually tested in higher level examinations and although the rubrics do not always specify explicitly the style of the type of the letter that the candidate must write, such information can be inferred from the description of the context of writing and the specification of the content of the letter. For example, candidates may be instructed to reply to the advertisement of an Au Pair agency in London without being told about the style of the type of letter expected. They can work out from the advertisement looking for au pairs that they have to write a letter of application using formal style since they are writing to an audience which they do not know.

Informal or personal letters are written to known readers, family members or friends, primarily with the purpose of keeping in touch. Personal letters are not usually categorised and labelled according to the purpose for writing but they can be found in teaching and testing materials of any language proficiency level. Personal letters are favoured by materials designers and language test developers because they make possible the teaching and testing of any lexical field (related words and

expressions like *father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt*), and any rhetorical mode (e.g. narration, description, argumentation). For example, in a letter to a friend in which the writer tells about a new house the family has bought, the candidate may use words commonly associated with a house (types of rooms, their size, arrangement) and the rhetorical mode called description. In a letter in which the writer gives an account of a weekend she spent hiking with classmates, the candidate may use a lot of words characteristic of hiking and the mode called narration (e.g. a lot of verbs and time expressions). The following two scripts illustrate the combination of the vocabulary needed to give a description of a room (Figure 4.1) and words associated with camping and narration within the text type called personal letter (Figure 4.2).

Dear David,

This is my first letter from our new home. We moved house last week, and we are all very happy!

Everything is so new and bright here, and I have my own room! It's spacious and it has a big balcony that looks on to the park opposite our house.

Next to my bed there's a shelf for my books and some magazines. My hi-fi is in the opposite corner of the room and there's a cosy armchair in front of it. I just love sitting in it, reading and listening to music.

However, the best thing in my room is a large desk, which looks really special. I designed it for the new room and helped my father to make it. It's really big, so I can study at it, but I can also use my computer that I got for my birthday on it. I love chatting on the net!

Well, I'm off for now.

Bye,
Kati

Dear Chris,

How are you? I'm fine. I have just come back from a wonderful bike tour, which took place in the hills. The only bad thing was that we couldn't continue the tour on Sunday, because the weather was awful and my parents took us home.

The tour started on Friday morning. I and my friend Tom decided to go camping in the hills because the forecast said that "it will be a sunny weekend." The first night we hadn't any problems, we pitched the tent and fried bacon. At midnight we put out the fire and then we went sleeping. The second day was the same as the first, but on Sunday morning it was raining heavily with a strong wind, so we knew that we couldn't stay there any more. We put all our things in the bags and cycled down from the hills to the town to call my parents because we hadn't got any dry clothes and we might have caught cold. My parents took us home and gave us dry clothes.

I hope next time I will not leave my raincoat at home. Have you ever had such an experience? I hope you enjoyed my letter.

Your friend
Tóni

Figure 4.1 Personal letter with description   **Figure 4.2** Personal letter with narration

The writer of the letter in Figure 4.1 describes the room generally by using the words *spacious* and *bright*. The description from an outside perspective (it has a *big balcony* which looks *on to a park*) is followed by a detailed description of the room from the inside *(bed, shelf, corner, cosy armchair, big desk)* with the use of several prepositions of place *(next to, opposite, in front of)* that help the reader imagine it.

The script in Figure 4.2 tells a story about camping, using words relevant to the topic *(go camping in the hills, pitched the tent, put out the fire)*. The words that are characteristic of the rhetorical mode are the numerous verbs and time phrases *(started on Friday morning, The first night, At midnight, then, The second day)* that make the script dynamic.

Formal and personal letters share the features characteristic of letters. Both have to specify at least the sender's and addressee's addresses, contain a salutation, a closing sentence, and a signing off. These elements and the way they are laid out distinguish a letter from all other text types (e.g. article, report). Formal and personal letters are, however, different in a number of ways and candidates must be aware of these differences.

Layout and organisation

Although the spread of computers and e-mail messages has diversified the accepted layout of letters, letter writers must conform to certain conventions if they are to write acceptable letters.

Most formal and personal letters start with the sender's address placed in the top right hand corner of the letter. What candidates tend to forget is that the sender's name does not have to be put above the address. In the case of personal letters, some language examinations explicitly instruct candidates not to write any postal addresses on the letter. If candidates are not explicitly asked to disregard this convention, they should include both the sender's and the addressee's address. Furthermore, the format of the address should follow the conventions characteristic of the country where the letter is from. A Hungarian candidate writing to an English person from a Hungarian address should *not* use the British address format for the Hungarian address (e.g. put the house number before the street name: *6 Málna u.*). The Hungarian address must follow the format stipulated by the Hungarian Post and the British address the format specified by the British Post.

The date must be positioned one line below the sender's address. However, if candidates do not have to write postal addresses, they can also choose to ignore specifying the date. In fact, some examinations explicitly ask candidates not to write dates. In case the date is included, the writer should use the format consistent with the spelling type: day/month/year with British English or month/day/year with American English spelling.

The title, name and address of the addressee must be written in a formal letter on the left hand side of the page. If the name of the person to whom the letter is addressed is not known, the writer can identify the addressee by title *(To the General Manager of the Store, To the Editor)*. This information is usually given in the test rubrics.

In some language examinations the salutation is given in the task (*Dear Sir, Dear Miss Brown,* or *Dear Tom*), so the candidate does not need to worry about selecting the stylistically appropriate form or about selecting the form appropriate to a given national variety (certain conventions in British English and American English are different). The salutation, however, determines the type of signing off as well as the punctuation that can be used after it, and this information is not always given for the candidate. Table 4.1. presents some typical combinations of salutation and signing off forms.

Table 4.1. Salutations and forms of singing off

Salutation	Signing off
Dear Sir	*Yours faithfully* (BE) *Yours truly* (AE)
Dear Miss Brown	*Yours sincerely* (BE) *Sincerely (yours)* (AE)
Dear Ann/Tom	*All the best / Kindest regards / Yours / Bye*

There is a confusing variety of combinations of punctuation marks used in letters nowadays even in course books, and it may appear that any punctuation is acceptable. However, a few basic rules must be observed, since especially in the case of an examination it is advisable that the candidate follows an accepted standard. The key characteristic feature of standards is consistency, so if no punctuation mark is used after the salutation, no punctuation mark should be used after the signing off. If a comma is used after the salutation, a comma should be used after the signing off. The mixing of punctuation marks should be avoided, except in the case of U.S. formal letters in which often a colon is used after the salutation and a comma after the signing off.

The body of the letter must normally be organised into paragraphs that may be either indented or block paragraphs. It is important that the candidate uses one type of paragraph consistently throughout the letter, and that the paragraphs not only break up the text visually but do indeed mark logical units within the text (ideas related to the different aspects of a topic are grouped together in separate paragraphs). Nevertheless, the use of paragraphs may not be necessary: a series of one-sentence paragraphs looks awkward and makes reading difficult, so this should be avoided. This is especially true in lower level examinations, where the candidates do not have the language resources necessary to develop in detail several subtopics in a letter and therefore write a string of simple, short sentences linked with simple connectors.

Before the signing off there is an ending or closing sentence that is not fixed for personal letters, but is usually fixed for most formal letters on the basis of the purpose for which the letter is written *(Thank you in anticipation for ..., I look forward to …)*. Such closing sentences form a paragraph on their own and this must be indicated with the use of indentation or empty lines before and after them.

In formal letters it is important that candidates leave some space after the signing off and may put down their full printed name to make sure that it is legible. They

must insert their signature between the signing off and the printed name. This is straightforward when the writer is word processing a letter, but candidates tend to forget it when they write formal letters in a language examination.

Content

It is a must for both formal and personal letters that they are carefully organised and communicate clear ideas. However, similarly to the layout of formal letters, the rules that apply to the content of formal letters are also stricter. Formal letters are written with a specific purpose and they must be clear and brief. The writer must state the purpose for writing in the introductory paragraph of the letter (Figure 4.3). By stating the purpose the writer also introduces the general topic of the letter.

I am writing to request information about the au pair job you advertised in the "Budapest Sun" in May.

Purpose: asking for information
Topic: an au pair job advertisement

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

My name is Anna Tamás and I am writing you because when I was in England in your camp last week I left one of my bags there and I hope you can find it and send it for me.

Purpose: asking for help
Topic: bag left at a campsite

Figure 4.3 Sample introductory paragraphs from letters of request

The information in the body of the letter must be organised in logical sequence with enough detail so as to make it possible for the reader to understand the message the writer wishes to communicate. The last paragraph of the letter should summarise the letter and restate its main purpose. Alternatively, the main purpose can be restated in the closing sentence *(I would be grateful if you could send me by FAX a confirmation letter concerning the room reservation)*.

Unlike a formal letter, a personal letter can have a more relaxed organisation. It usually begins with introductory questions and chatty comments before the reason for writing is stated. For example: *How are you? I am pretty tired because we had an awful trip at the weekend* or *How are you? I'm fine. I was happy to receive your letter. What was your summer holiday like?*

The body of the letter must contain relevant and sufficient information organised logically. The ending in a personal letter can be an excuse to finish writing *(I must stop writing because my friends may arrive any minute now. We are going to watch a movie I rented)* or a closing statement that brings the letter to an end *(Well, that is all my news)*. A personal letter, which is usually less carefully planned than a formal letter, may contain afterthoughts added after the signature and introduced by the abbreviation *PS* (postscript).

Style

One of the most noticeable features that make the difference between formal and personal letters is style. Style is usually associated with the kinds of words writers use and the way they use them; however, style involves more than this. In the case of letters the layout itself carries information about style (e.g. with the inclusion of addresses in formal letters). Conciseness and chattiness are also characteristic features of formal and personal letters respectively. The tone and grammar of a text also contribute to the shaping of its style. Some features of the style of formal and personal letters that language course books do not usually discuss are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Differences between formal and informal style

Formal Style	Informal Style
Tone	
Impersonal tone, realised with the use of: – passive structures – *It* sentences *(It is often argued …)* – last names – formal linking words and phrases *(moreover, nevertheless, in addition to …, contrary to …)*	Personal tone, realised with the use of: – active structures – direct reference to/involvement of the reader *(e.g. Here's some news for you …, Can you believe it?)* – first names – attitude words and phrases *(anyway, well, luckily, right, let's)*
Grammar	
– prepositions and relative pronouns used together *(I received a rejection from an employer for a job <u>for which</u> I knew I was qualified.)* – relative pronouns included *(The woman whom he admired …)* – co-ordinating linking words *(and, or, but)* between clauses in a sentence	– separated prepositions and relative pronouns *(I didn't get the job <u>which</u> I applied <u>for</u>.)* – relative pronouns left out *(The woman she admired …)* – co-ordinating linking words *(and, or, but)* at the beginning of sentences
Vocabulary	
– neutral / formal – no shortened word forms, no slang	– colloquial vocabulary and expressions – shortened word forms, slang allowed

Formal letters

Formal letters are categorised and labelled on the basis of their purpose. The most frequent types of formal letters that candidates write in examinations are letters of application, letters of complaint, letters to the editor, and letters asking for information. Formal letters require an advanced command of the language; therefore, candidates do not usually have to write formal letters in lower level language examinations or are not tested for the conventions of letter writing layout.

Application letters

The letter of application begins with the specification of the reason for writing *(e.g. I am writing to apply for ... , I am writing to you with reference to ...)*. Writers may be applying for instance for a job, a course, or a scholarship. In order to let the reader know which job they are referring to, the name of the job must also be mentioned in the letter together with where and when the writers saw it advertised.

After writers have made it clear to the reader what they are applying for, they must give the reason why they want to apply for the job. This should be followed with a description of the personal qualities, qualifications and practical skills that make the writer suitable for the job.

At the end of the letter, writers can thank the readers for their time and consideration, repeat the reason for writing, or state that they look forward to receiving a response. The following are typical sentences for ending a letter of application:

Thank you for your consideration.
Thank you for considering me for this position.
Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.
Thank you for your time and consideration of my qualifications.
I am very interested in ... . I look forward to hearing from you.

Study the sample task given in Figure 4.4 and read the sample script following it (Figure 4.5).

You would like to work in England for a year. You have read this advertisement in a magazine:

> ### SECRETARY WANTED URGENTLY
>
> Word-processing experience required.
> Minimum intermediate level English.
> Italian useful but not essential.
> To apply write to:
> THE GIANNI VALDO ORGANISATION
> The Capital House, Oak Road, Colindale, London
> NW9 OED

Write a **letter** of application.

In your letter write about:

- why you are writing
- your education
- your word-processing experience
- your language skills
- when you could start the job

Write a letter of about **120 words** in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Sir or Madam,

_____

_____

_____

Figure 4.4 Letter of application task

In the body of the letter, the writer provides all the relevant pieces of information that the advertisement requests (word-processing skills, English and Italian knowledge) and adds further relevant details that may enhance her chances of getting the job (work experience).

Dear Sir or Madam,

I read your job advertisement and would like to apply for the job.

I finished the secondary school two years ago. Since we learnt type-writing and how to use word-processors, I am very good at both of them. Due to an Italian friend of mine, I worked for an Italian company as a secretary, so I have the experience of being a secretary. I can make all the machines operate, that a secretary works with. I could also get acquainted with the Italian language itself, which resulted in a progress in the level of my Italian. I also passed the intermediate language exam in English a year ago.

I returned home from Italy a month ago, so I do not have a job at the moment. I can start to work whenever you want me to start. I can also go for an interview at any time.

I would be happy if we could talk about the job. Please contact me at any time.

Yours faithfully,

B.Zs.

Figure 4.5 Sample letter of application

The letter ends with the candidate restating her interest in the position and her availability, which may also better her chances of getting the job. Overall, the letter communicates the message of the writer and a careful reader should have no difficulties in understanding it in spite of the language mistakes.

Letter of complaint

The letter of complaint, which can also be an open letter addressed to the editor, starts with the specification of the reason for writing, the statement of the complaint (e.g. *I am writing to protest/complain about …*). Writers must state clearly what they are complaining about and provide as much detail as is necessary for the readers to understand the problem.

You and your parents spent a 10-day holiday at a hotel whose advertisement you can see below:

> ### ABBEYGLEN CASTLE HOTEL
> **Clifden, Connemara, Co. Galway, Eire.**
>
> Abbeyglen Castle is a four star luxury hotel set in idyllic Gardens with Open Fires, Candlelight Dining, Elegant Bedrooms, Jacuzzi Spa Pool, Sauna, Afternoon Tea, Car Parking, Porterage, warm welcome and peace and quiet. Golf, Fishing, Pony Trekking and Hill Walking nearby.
> Pets welcome.
>
> ### SPECIAL OFFERS
> *Any 3 days June £179*
> *Any three days July/August £199*
> DINNER, BED AND BREAKFAST

Some of the services listed in the advertisement were not available. Write a letter of about 150 words to the manager in which you complain about the following:

- no porter on arrival – long wait
- spa pool, sauna – under construction
- camera stolen from the car in the car park
- neighbouring disco noisy at night

Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Sir or Madam,

_____

_____

_____

Figure 4.6 Letter of complaint task

Candidates often highlight a problem and explain the reasons for their complaint but do not suggest what action they expect from the reader (an

alternative arrangement, an apology, a refund or some other compensation, or a replacement). Such letters usually end with the writer's polite suggestion for action and request an answer, so students must learn to end a complaint letter in this manner. A few examples of concluding sentences are provided below:

> *I look forward to your reply and a resolution of my complaint.*
> *I look forward to receiving an apology and a correction of the facts.*
> *I look forward to your early reply. Should you require any further information please contact me.*
> *I look forward to your response.*

Study the sample task given in Figure 4.6 and read the sample script (Figure 4.7).

Dear Sir or Madam,

My family and me have just returned from a stay at your hotel. We are very disappointed, to say the least, with some of what we experienced during our stay.

    On arrival there was nobody to receive us and we had to wait for a long time before we could register and go to our rooms. We wanted to go to the pool to swim and to spend some time in the sauna, but they were under reconstruction, as you know.

    Two days later our digital camera was stolen from our car parked in the car park of the hotel. The receptionist told us she was sorry but did not do anything to help. She told us that it was no use going to the police.

    Your advertisement said that the hotel is peaceful and quiet, but there was a disco close to it and the noise was very unpleasant in the evenings.

    I believe that you should not advertise services that you cannot offer and hope that you can give us a refund.

    I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

L.Sz.

Figure 4.7 Sample letter of complaint

    The writer effectively identifies the complaint in the introductory paragraph of the letter in Figure 4.7. The reader, who is the manager of the hotel, learns that the writer is a customer who writes because he was displeased with the service.

    The body of the letter formulates the justification of the complaint. The writer lists the reasons why the members of his family think that the hotel did not provide the quality service promised in the advertisement. The claim that the service was poor is substantiated with a series of relevant and concrete examples.

    Having justified the complaint, the writer demands that the manager should do

two things: advertise more carefully and consider giving a refund for the displeased customers. The candidate thus not only formulates a complaint in the letter but does so with a specific reason, argues his case convincingly and asks for a specific action and a reply. He is objective and maintains a polite and dispassionate tone throughout, which are the key features of an effective complaint letter.

Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor is written to express an opinion about current events, issues, topics, or about articles published in newspapers or magazines. In the introduction writers must state their reason for writing, the topic they wish to address and their opinion about it (e.g. *I am writing with regard to your recent review of the ..., I feel I have to express my disagreement with ...*). It is important that the writers clearly identify the topic that they are discussing so that readers know whether they are expressing their opinion about an article published in an earlier issue of the newspaper or magazine, a new film, or the latest developments in politics.

You have found out that the local council is planning to close your school, Rózsa Sándor Secondary School, and sell the building. You will not be taught by your teachers, and you have to go to a school which does not have a green area and is not so pleasant as your own school.

You have decided with your schoolmates to write about this plan to all the major newspapers published in Hungary.

Write a letter of about 150-180 words long to the editor of an English language newspaper published in Budapest in which you describe the situation and state your reasons why the school should not be closed.

To the Editor:

_____
_____
_____

Figure 4.8 Letter to the editor task

Writers must support their opinion about the topic in the body of the letter. Some typical sentences introducing the writers' opinion that are used in letters to the editor are the following:

I am totally opposed to ...
It worries me that ...
Although .... I still believe ....
I was distressed at the number of…

In the concluding paragraph writers must summarise their opinion and can make some suggestions. Letters to the editor must be written carefully, so as to be easy to understand; furthermore, they must be to the point and accurate. They can also be witty or ironic if the use of these forms of expression makes the message more effective. The style of a letter to the editor is usually semi-formal or formal. The usual salutation in such letters is *To the Editor,* and the appropriate closing formulas are *Yours faithfully* or *Yours truly.*

Study the sample task given in Figure 4.8 and read the sample script (Figure 4.9).

To the Editor:

I am a student attending Rózsa Sándor secondary school and we have just leant that our school will close because there is no money. We will lose our teachers and the building and the park and have to go to another school. But we don't want that.

We like our school. Although the building almost lies in pieces, and the lunch is very bad. This isn't only my opinion, lots of my friends and other students are on this opinion. But the teaching is very good. The school's teachers are in the bests. Personally I like this school very much because of the physics and chemistry classes. I do not like the human classes, but I know that all people must know these things too and they can learn it well here.

I like that most of these students are very intelligent and they have good behaviour so we can learn well at lessons.

This school is good in Hungary by watching the examination test for universities. These teachers are capable for new things (both old and young teachers), for example in physics and chemistry the newest scientific thing. In this school you never bored.

I like this school because it has a park. I sit there with my friends and talk after the school. We can play football.

So I don't want to go to another school.

Sincerely,
H.J.

Figure 4.9 Sample letter to the editor

The writer of the letter to the editor (Figure 4.9) introduces the topic of the letter to the reader and includes the reason why the school is about to be closed. The position of the writer and her schoolmates is stated clearly: they do not wish to go to another school. In the body of the letter the writer discusses the reasons why she likes her school.

The support is constructed highly persuasively. The writer first describes the major weaknesses of the school (its state of repair and the quality of the food served in the school's canteen), and following this she contrasts these negative features with the best that the school can offer: effectively taught humanity subjects, the company of intelligent and disciplined students, good teachers who are up-to-date and can prepare students for university entrance examinations, and finally the park.

The conclusion is short and restates the main idea of the letter, although in a slightly changed format since the writer shifted the focus from *we* to *I* in the body of the letter. In spite of the frequent inaccuracies, the writer manages to construct a reasoned argument which is persuasive and which the reader can follow.

Letter of Request

The letter of request is written in order to obtain additional information on goods, services, facilities, jobs, courses, etc. Writers must specify in the first paragraph the purpose for writing and what they wish to receive information about *(I am writing to inquire about ...)*. The main body of the letter must focus on the information the writer requires. In this section of the letter some candidates write only questions, and as a result the letter becomes a string of loosely connected questions that do not read like a coherent piece of writing. To avoid this, candidates should be advised to use a variety of question types and alternate direct and reported questions with statements. The following excerpt from a script illustrates this type of deficiency where there are too many questions with little interconnection:

> *I would like to ask some questions. I would like to know which subjects are taught in the school. Only human subjects or realistic subjects, too? What kind of class sizes are in your school? Do the students have to wear the school uniform? If there is uniform, do we have to make it? How much fee do we have to pay in a year? Which foreign languages are taught in the school? Can the students sport? And which social, cultural and sporting programmes are there?*

The closing sentence must repeat the request and thank the reader for her help. The following are closing sentences used to end a letter of request:

I would be grateful if you could send me a catalogue.
Thank you in anticipation for your help.
I would be grateful if you could clarify whether I can apply for the position.

Study the sample task given in Figure 4.10 and read the sample script following it (Figure 4.11).

You have a 10-year-old brother. Your parents would like to send him to an English-speaking school. They have read this advertisement in a Budapest newspaper:

British International School
➢ British international education for students aged 5 to 19
➢ Academic and personal development
➢ Foreign languages
➢ Social, cultural and sporting programmes

For more information write to: Dr. Paul Gregg, Headmaster
Budapest, H-1113 Pasa u. 8.

Your parents have asked you to write a letter to the headmaster of the school. In your letter say:

• why you are writing

and ask about:

• the subjects taught in the school
• class sizes
• the school uniform
• the fee to pay

Write a letter of about 100-120 words in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Dr. Gregg,

Figure 4.10 Letter of request task

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I am writing to you because I've read the advertisement of your school in a newspaper. I would like to know more about it because my ten-year-old brother wants to attend an English speaking school.

I would like to know more about the subjects you teach in your school. Which are the most popular with the students? And what other subjects do you teach besides foreign languages?

I'm interested in how big the classes are, and I would like to know if students have to wear a school uniform and if we should have it made or we can buy it in your school.

I have another important question: how much is the fee that we have to pay? We are not so wealthy and I would like to know if there's any chance to pay the fee in parts.

Thank you for your help. I'm looking forward to your answer.

Yours sincerely,
A.G.

Figure 4.11 Sample letter of request

The writer of the letter of request (Figure 4.11) gives the reader enough background information to understand the writing situation and to be able to follow him. In the introduction he states the reason for writing clearly. This is important because it is the writer's responsibility to make the text straightforward so that the reader does not have to interpret it as would be the case with a piece of creative writing (e.g. a poem). Interpretation may lead to the distortion of the message, in other words, if the readers have to guess what the writer intends to communicate, they may guess something different instead of the intended message.
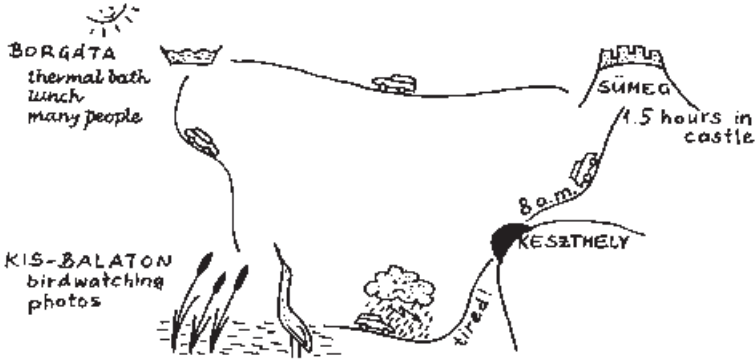
The body of the letter consists of a string of indirect questions that read more naturally than the series of questions in the excerpt given previously. The writer finishes the letter effectively by thanking the reader and politely urging her to reply.

Personal letters

Personal letters can be written for a variety of purposes and the candidates may be asked to write about any topic using any rhetorical mode. Since personal letters are less difficult than formal letters, they are frequent in lower level examinations, some of which do not test the conventions of letter writing layout.

   Study the sample task given in Figure 4.12 and read the sample script following it (Figure 4.13).

> You spent your last holiday in Keszthely at Lake Balaton. You took a day trip in the countryside with your family. Write a short letter to your pen-friend about it, and use all the information from the illustration.
>
> BORGÁTA
> thermal bath
> lunch
> many people
>
> SÜMEG
> 1.5 hours in castle
>
> 8 a.m.
>
> KESZTHELY
>
> KIS-BALATON
> birdwatching
> photos
>
> tired!
>
> Write a **letter** of about **120 words** on the lines. Do not write any dates or addresses.
>
> Dear Chris,

Figure 4.12 Personal letter task

> *Dear Chris,*
>
> I'm writing you again. I spent two weeks in Keszthely, at lake Balaton. I was there with my family. It was good, very very good, and it was not boring!
>
> We had a day trip on Sunday. We got up at 7 o'clock, and after a quick breakfast we left Keszthely at 8. a.m. We went to Sümeg and spent there one and a half hour. The castle was old and beautiful. We drunk a coffee there and after it we left the castle.
>
> We arrived to Borgáta at about 12 o'clock. We had a long bath in Borgáta's thermal water, and after a freshing shower we had a delicious lunch at a restaurant. There was many people who wanted to eat, so the waiter was very busy!
>
> We left Borgáta at 3 o'clock and we went to the Kis-Balaton, where we could see many coloured bird at the lake, and I took many photoes, I'll show them next time!
>
> We went back Keszthely after the birdwatching. We were tired and a summer rain caught us. But finally we arrived there, to Keszthely!
>
> See you soon,
>
> x.y.

Figure 4.13 Sample personal letter

The candidate introduces the topic of the personal letter (Figure 4.13) and the reader can guess that the script will be an account of the trip. The events are narrated in chronological order: there are frequent logical references to time throughout the body of the letter. The script is therefore coherent and easy to follow.

The writer acknowledges the presence of the reader in three instances: in the introduction *(I'm writing you again),* in the body *(I took many photoes, I'll show them next time),* and in the signing off *(See you soon).* Addressing the reader directly is a characteristic feature of informal language use, so it is stylistically appropriate in a friendly letter.

Closing remarks

The types of formal and informal letters represent the letters that occur most frequently in language examinations. The sample scripts show that even a text type as common as the letter can cause candidates a range of difficulties that are not language- but primarily text type-specific. Writing tutors have to focus, therefore, on the development of their students' sense of audience and purpose. They must teach and practice the conventions typical of the letter in preparation for language

examinations so that their students can concentrate on the content of their letters in an examination.

Whereas on the surface it seems that the different letter types are very much alike, and in some respects (such as the statement of the purpose for writing in the introduction) they are indeed uniform, a closer analysis reveals that their content and organisation vary with the purpose for which they are written. The following section contains letter writing tasks suitable for the practice of formal and informal letters written for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Writing teachers are encouraged to use these letter writing tasks for assessment purposes. They should teach the various letter writing tasks and practise them with the help of the tasks available in course books. Once students have mastered writing a particular type of letter, they can attempt one of the tasks below.

The expected length of the scripts to be written is given for each task and students should complete each task in half an hour. Whereas the use of dictionaries should be practised in classroom writing activities and students should be encouraged to use dictionaries when they are writing at home, teachers should not allow the use of dictionaries when their students are taking an in-class writing test. The most important reason for this is that students spend a lot of time looking up words and may fail to complete the task in half an hour.

Teachers are encouraged to mark the scripts produced by the students with the help of an analytical scale (p. 127 later in the book) and give separate scores and feedback to students on Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Vocabulary and Grammar. Such detailed feedback helps apprentice writers to identify their weaknesses and to focus on improving them. Alternatively, teachers may decide to focus only on the content and organisation of ideas in the first draft of the letter and leave the correction of vocabulary and grammar to the second draft. It can also help to improve the students' writing skills if the teacher asks them to correct their scripts with the help of the feedback received and to submit it again for a second reading.

Tips for the writer

- Use the appropriate layout for a letter.
- Include addresses and the date in the letter unless you are instructed not to do so.
- Use the standard address format for both English and local addresses. Do not "translate" local postal addresses.
- Read the task carefully before you decide what type of letter to write.
- Use a signing off consistent with the salutation and use punctuation appropriately and consistently.
- Use the same style from the beginning to the end of the letter.

Practice Tasks

Formal Letter Tasks

Task 1

You were in a summer camp in England. You left a small bag there. Write to the camp and say:

• why you are writing
• what the bag is like
• what there was in it
• why the bag is important for you

And ask

• how to get it back

Write a letter of about 120 words. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Task 2

Your school would like to take part in an international student exchange project. You have been asked to write a letter of introduction of about 150-200 words to the staff and the students of the potential partner schools.

In your letter:

• introduce yourself briefly
• say why you are writing
• tell about your school briefly
• mention some activities the students do after school
• tell about your school's aims in the project

Write your letter in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Task 3

You have read an article in an English language newspaper published in Hungary about the unbearable amount of litter in big Hungarian cities today. Write a letter of about 120-150 words to the editor of this newspaper in which you express your opinion on the issue and propose your solutions to the problem.

Task 4

Write a letter of 120-150 words to the editor of an electronic newspaper you read regularly, expressing your concerns about the relationship between parents and

children in Hungary. Describe the possible causes of the problem (both parents and children spend a lot of time working, families do not have time for one another, they quarrel a lot etc.) and suggest steps for the improvement of the situation.

Task 5

You have seen the following advertisement in a foreign-language magazine.

Recorded books
Listen to recorded books while you drive or ride to work or school.
Expert narrators bring great books to life.
Contact us by email at talkingbooks@lagoon.net.uk

Write a letter of about 120-150 words in an appropriate style to find out about the following:

• the types of books available
• the nationality of the narrators
• how to rent a book

and ask for:

• a catalogue
• a sample cassette

Do not write any dates or addresses.

Task 6

In a paper you found the following advertisement for school leavers.

Learn English at a State College

DO NOT MISS: SCHOOL LEAVERS' LANGUAGE COURSE
• big or small groups
• modern or traditional methods
• accommodation with families or in hotels
• sports activities or sightseeing
• one or two week courses
   If interested contact:
   Ms Mary J. Smith, 3 Oak Lane, London, W1N4AP

You would like to attend this course.

Write a **letter** in about **80-100 words** in which you explain to Ms Smith the preferences you have about 2 points made in the advertisement and enquire about the price.

N.B. Write a few sentences about each point.

Task 7

You and your classmates have just returned from the end-of-year school trip to Malta. On the last evening you went to an all-night party instead of spending time on your packing. Now you realise that you must have left **TWO** very important possessions behind.

Write a letter of 100-120 words in which you

• describe the possessions
• explain where you think you left them
• offer to pay for all postage costs

Send your letter to: **The Manager**
Days Inn
76, Cathedral Street
Sliema
Malta

Task 8

You are spending an academic year at the University of Kent on a students' exchange programme. You are living in **Eliot College (staircase E, room 25).** The students living next door have been disturbing you at night for quite a long time. You have already tried to solve the problem without any success.

Now write a formal letter of complaint to college authorities in which you:

• explain the situation by giving one reason for your complaint,
• ask the administration for help and suggest what you expect them to do.

Write your letter of 100-120 words to:

Ms Alice Grey, Central Managers' Office, University of Kent, Canterbury

Task 9

The following advertisement persuaded your class to go to Spain for the end-of-year trip. You were bitterly disappointed to find that 3 points made in the advertisement were not true. In about 100-120 words write a letter of complaint to the agency explaining your problems and asking for your money back.

PALM TREE HOTEL
Enjoy a 10 day dream holiday in sunny Spain

Beautiful small hotel by the beach
* fully air-conditioned
* rooms with two or three beds, bathroom
* small private beach
* bicycle and boat hire
* water sports available at nearby Eldorado Hotel sports centre

all meals included in price
* buffet breakfast
* salad bar

evening entertainment
* live music on terrace
* discos just two minutes from hotel

two organised excursions included in price
* moonlight cruise
* fish picnic

For further details contact: Rainbow Tourist Agency, 22 Eldorado Heights, Malaga, Spain

---

Personal Letter Tasks

Task 1

You met Wanda in a Warsaw summer school, where you practised English with Central European students. She is visiting you next month. Write her a letter about

• your trip home from Poland
• a good time you had recently
• what you will show her in Hungary
• a Hungarian custom

Write a letter of about 200 words. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Wanda,

Task 2

You want to invite your English pen-friend to visit you in the summer. Write him/her a letter in which you:

• invite him/her
• ask about the time of the visit
• say something about your home
• say what places you want to show him/her

Write a letter of about 120 words. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Task 3

Pat, a British student, will visit your school and stay with your family for two weeks. Write him/her a letter to introduce yourself. Write about:

• why you are writing
• how you spend your free time
• what Pat and you will do together
• what clothes to bring

Write a letter of about 100 words. Do not write any dates or addresses. Start your letter with

Dear Pat,

Task 4

The following text appeared in an internet magazine for students.

Physical Education
by Mary – Brecksville, Ohio, US

Everyone says they wish they had more time in the day. I know how they feel when I have to stay up late to finish homework. If I didn't have to take P.E. classes, I would have more time for everything.

What is your opinion? Write a letter to Mary. In your letter, write about

• your opinion about Mary's idea
• why some students like PE
• why you like or dislike it
• what young people could do to have more time

Write about 200 words below. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Mary,

Task 5

Your school is organising the school-leavers' party next month. Write a letter to your English pen-friend in which you ask for advice about the following:

- ball or disco
- programme
- food and drinks
- clothes

Write a letter of about 200 words in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Task 6

You have just got back from a bike tour and decided to write about it to your English pen-friend Chris. The pictures below show what happened to you. Use all the pictures and write the story of your holiday. Write a letter of about 150 words in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.
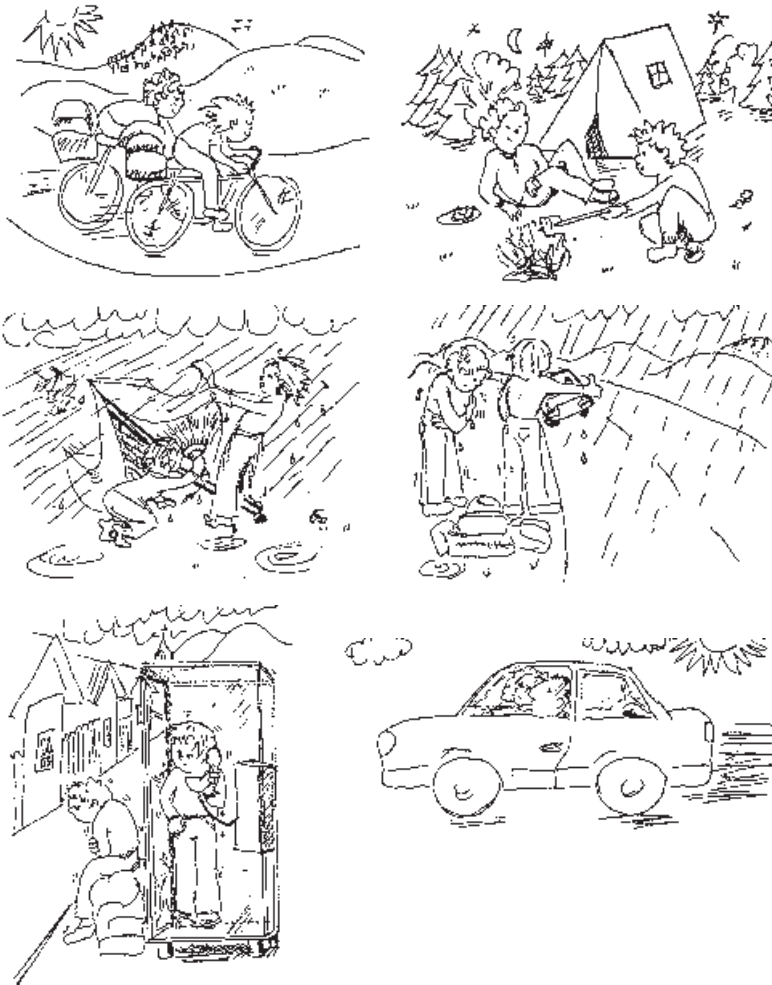
Task 7

You and your family have moved to a little village from a town some weeks ago. Write a short letter of about 120-150 words to your English friend about the following points:

• the place where you moved
• why you decided to move
• what the house is like
• what you like/don't like about the house
• the things you missed
• invite your friend to your new place

Write the letter in an appropriate style.

_____
_____
_____
                                                                21st September

Dear Peter,

_____
_____

Task 8

Write to your English pen-friend about celebrating your 18th birthday. Write about:

• who you invited to the party
• what preparations you made
• what you did
• if you had a good time

Describe the event in about 150 words in an appropriate style.

Task 9

Your school runs an exchange programme. Your foreign partner (Jane or John) will come over for a week to stay with you. Here are the things you need to write about in your letter:

• who you are
• your family
• where you live
• your home
• a place and programme you will go to together
• ask about: food, music and hobbies

Write a **letter** of about **150 words**. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Chapter 5
Article

General characteristics of the text type

The article is widely used in developing and testing writing competence. It is a short, self-contained piece of writing on a particular topic with a heading or title, an introduction, a body and a conclusion. It is written to be published in a newspaper, a magazine, a newsletter or on a web site. The main function of this text type is to engage the reader's attention in order to communicate a particular message, for example with the intention to inform, persuade or simply entertain. The target audience for the article is often a person who is of the same age as the writer, somebody who shares the same interests as the writer, or a competition judge, given that an incentive of some kind is often built into the task: writers, for example, enter a competition in which the best article is published in a magazine, or they may receive some prize like a trip abroad. The subject of the article can range from simpler topics like the description of shopping facilities in a city to more complex ones such as the suggestion of a solution to a problem.

Layout and organisation

Articles must have a title often referred to as a heading. In a language examination the candidate may be provided with a heading or may be asked to create one. The heading must be interesting and attractive so as to make the reader want to read the article. Typical techniques for creating such headings are the use of questions *(Do zoos matter?),* dramatic *(We don't need another hero)* or unfinished statements *(A smile in time ...),* or wordplay *(How much is much?).* However, whichever technique is used a heading must be informative, that is, it must give the reader an idea what the article is about. A common mistake that language learners make when writing an article is that they do not write a heading, which may not only be due to forgetfulness but to some EFL course books in which articles are presented without headings.

   While the functions of a heading are to attract the reader's attention and reveal the subject or topic of the piece of writing, the next section of the article, the introduction, must make it clear to the reader what the article is about and what specific aspect of the topic it addresses. In order to achieve this, the introduction must outline the content of the article. The introduction thus serves as a transition between the title and the body of the article. It is a common mistake that language learners start the article as a letter in spite of the fact that the introductory statements in a letter are different from the introduction to an article.

   The main section of the article is the body. The first requirement concerning the body in the case of longer articles is that it should be divided into paragraphs: different ideas should be discussed in separate paragraphs. This helps the reader to follow the writer's discussion of the topic more easily. However, if the article is

short and does not contain several ideas discussed in detail, the body may be drafted as one paragraph. A sequence of one-sentence paragraphs makes a very poor text.

Nevertheless, one-paragraph texts should not be considered ideal in the case of longer scripts. It is a general expectation that the body of a developed article includes description, examples, opinions, comments or even anecdotes, and this makes it necessary for writers to divide their scripts into paragraphs.

The last section, the conclusion, serves to round off the article. It must conclude the article by summing up the message the writer wants to express. This can be done, for example, in the form of a brief summary of the ideas discussed in the body, or with a restatement of the main idea of the piece. As long as it rounds off the article, in a short script it is also acceptable to have a question for conclusion.

Content

Article tasks are usually more successfully assigned to language learners of higher language proficiency; nevertheless, the task type is often included in course books for learners with a low level of language proficiency. Given that language competence is a crucial factor that determines the quality of the article, at lower levels the expectations are lower concerning the complexity and development of the ideas included in an article as well as the range of grammatical structures and vocabulary used. Instead of developed introductions and conclusions that can be expected of a more proficient learner, at lower levels a one sentence introduction or conclusion is considered satisfactory.

Similarly, while in the case of a higher level learner the reader expects a developed presentation of an opinion on a problematic or controversial issue (for example articles discussing issues concerning the environment or endangered species), in the case of a less proficient learner a simple, evaluation or comment-free description is considered sufficient (for example, an article about a famous landmark). The lower the language competence of the writer is the less interesting the topics addressed are and the more superficial the discussion becomes.

Style

The style of the article is determined by the audience and the topic, and it can range from informal to formal. Articles that are about personal or humorous topics and are intended for peers can be treated more informally (for example, an article about the best party the writer has ever been to published in a magazine aimed at teenagers). Articles that deal with serious topics and are written for a general audience in order to persuade or to present an opinion on a particular issue must be neutral or formal in tone (for example, an article for an international travel magazine for adults on the best sights in and around the writer's city). A frequent mistake of language learners is that they fail to use the same style throughout the article: they seem to forget about their audience and start mixing the registers halfway through the script.

Sample article task and script analysis

The sample scripts presented in Figures 5.2 and 5.3 below were written on the task given in Figure 5.1 and will be examined from the point of view of text-type features and organisation.

   The article is to be written for a school magazine that is published in English. The readers are primarily the writer's peers, so the style and the content of the article must be appropriate for them. The first content point helps the candidate to express the main idea of the article. By answering the question, the candidate takes a stand on the issue.

   The dominant discourse mode of the article is persuasion since the candidate formulates a claim at the beginning and builds support for it by weighing advantages against disadvantages. The second and third content points give the candidate the opportunity to say either that local people benefit from the shopping mall or not. The candidate can argue both for or against the shopping mall; the content points can be developed into supporting ideas to support a claim for or against.

> You have heard that the local government is planning to build a new shopping mall with a large parking lot right next to your school, at the place where there is a large sports ground now. Your school has an English-language student magazine. You have decided to write for it an **article** with the heading "*Shopping mall or sports ground?*" in which you give your opinion about this plan.
>
> In your article consider the following:
>
> • Which one is needed more?
> • Benefits for the local people
> • Drawbacks for the local people
> • Effect on the environment
>
> Write your article in about **200-250** words.

   Figure 5.1 Article task

   The heading for the article is provided in the task, so the candidates did not have to write their own headings. The introduction of Article A (Figure 5.2) is better written than that of Article B (Figure 5.3): in Article A the topic is introduced, in Article B the writer assumes that the reader is familiar with the task and does not introduce the topic. Article B is not a self-contained piece of writing: it cannot be interpreted on its own. In Article A the writer moves gradually to the formulation of the main message of the article: the introduction establishes the topic and formulates a specific stand on it. Instead of introducing the topic and his

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I am fully aware that we are supposed to be a *consumer society,* and I support that. Honest. But when we start to consume things that are a fair bit more important than material belongings, then maybe it's time to stand up and say "back off"! What I'm talking about, of course, is the government's plan to build a shopping mall – parking lot combo where the sports ground is. Now don't get me wrong I understand the many valid reasons for it. After all, it would make shopping *so* much easier for the locals who have to travel fifteen whole minutes to get to the nearest mall and spend unreasonable amounts of their hard-earned money. Building yet another one here (besides the at least ten other ones scattered around the city) would also make it possible for the more fitness-conscious to jog to the shops, which would indeed fully compensate the loss of the football field that undeservingly occupies so much potential commercial area. Doesn't it? As you read through this article you are probably thinking "Oh, great, he'll surely go on babbling about the environmental effects and everything." Well, you're wrong. I'm not going to rant about the increased traffic, noise damage, construction waste, and I'm definitely not going to even mention the effect of the mall on the students' mentality. See here, I'm not judging the authorities or anything. I just feel the urge to voice my opinion and stand up for our rights to our health and pace of life.

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I think the new shopping mall with the parking is much more important than the sports ground. A new shopping mall can make our life easier. There are many sports ground in this country, but shopping malls used to be so far from many place. A new shopping mall has many benefits for the local people. Many people wouldn't have to sit in their car, if they want to buy more foods, for example before weekends. In shopping malls used to be sale, so it can be cheaper for many local people. Of course it would have some drawbacks, if the shopping mall will build. Some people, who like sports, should go to further to do sports and some people perhaps don't like the busy shopping malls. Of course a shopping mall would have many bad effect on the environment. In the air would be some toxic gases, in that country. The shopping mall would be very busy that many people doesn't like.

Figure 5.2 Article **A**   **Figure 5.3** Article **B**

attitude on it, in Article B the writer includes in the introduction arguments that should appear in the body of the article.

Although there is an obvious attempt to discuss different aspects concerning the topic in different paragraphs in Article B, with the benefits, drawbacks and effects on the environment discussed in separate paragraphs the article does not work effectively towards the establishment of one clear opinion, namely that the shopping mall is needed. The arguments brought up in support of the writer's position are not convincing.

Contrary to this, in Article A the opinion of the writer is clear to the reader: the writer has a clear aim and includes each idea in order to achieve her aim, that is to convince the reader that the sports ground is more important than the shopping mall. The conclusion is missing from Article B. After reading it, the reader does not have a feeling of completeness about the article, whereas Article A contains a concluding paragraph that brings it to a forceful end.

The writer of Article A has a clear sense of the context: she knows both how much information the audience has about the topic, how to address the audience using the same style throughout the article, and also what her aim is. The article is a self-contained, complete piece of writing with a clear beginning, middle and end that serve one common purpose: to present the writer's position concerning the issue and the ideas that support her position.

Concluding Remarks

Considering its structure and the purposes that an article serves, this text type is more suitable for students who have more language resources to draw on than lower proficiency language learners. In order to familiarise learners with this text type, they must be presented with sample articles and given the opportunity to write their own articles on a variety of topics to various audiences.

The following section contains sample article tasks that can be used both for practice and for assessment purposes. The length of the scripts expected to be produced is given in each task. Depending on the proficiency level of the learners, teachers may modify the time given for the completion of the tasks. Higher language proficiency students should be able to write a script of 250 words in forty-five minutes.

Although the tasks are intended primarily for learners with higher language proficiency, teachers may choose to administer them to lower language ability students. In such cases the required length of the scripts and the time allocated for the completion of the task can be reduced. For instance, given that lower ability learners elaborate less the ideas (content points) that must be included in the task, they may not be expected to write more than 150 words in about thirty minutes.

When reading the articles, teachers should focus primarily on the features characteristic of the text type in order to determine how successfully the learners have managed to master them. They should focus first on the content of the article and on the logical arrangement of the ideas within it. Specific language problems (e.g. vocabulary or grammar) must be addressed after content and organisation.

Language learners must also be trained to revise their scripts by first checking content and organisation. They should only start reading for language problems once they are satisfied with the content.

Tips for the writer

- Write a heading (title) if it is not given in the task.
- Avoid using letter format for an article: do not start and end the article as a letter.
- Try to keep the article clear, informative and lively; engage the reader's interest throughout.
- Write well-developed ideas: include descriptions, examples, opinions, and comments.
- Use the same style throughout the article.

Practice Tasks

Task 01

No Kidding, an international student magazine, has invited readers to share their views about the computer. Write an article to give your opinion and advice to other students.

Include the following points:

• Computers in education
• Computers and entertainment
• Health issues
• Computers and relationships

Write your article with the heading "The Computer – Friend or Foe?" Write about 200-250 words.

Task 02

INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE MAGAZINE

We would like to print articles from YOU about YOUR school.

• If you could change TWO aspects of your school, what would they be? (The building? The hours? Other aspects?) Why?
• What TWO aspects would you keep the same? (The teachers? The library? Other aspects?) Why?

Write us an article of about 200-250 words answering these questions, explaining your views in detail.

Task 03

An international student magazine is running a series of articles called "Our Changing World." This week's topic is "The Effect Computers Have on Our Daily World." By choosing four of the following points, write an article for the magazine in which you give your opinion. Write about 250 words.

• Limitless access to information
• Music and games from the Internet
• Cheap and fast medium
• Books replaced by computers
• Computer crime
• Loss of real communication

Task 04

In a television programme you heard angry parents saying that teenagers enjoy too much freedom nowadays. Write an article for your school's English language magazine, in which you give your opinion.

Write about the following points:

• freedom at home
• freedom at school
• freedom in choosing a career
• teenagers' freedom in Hungary

Write the article with the heading "Too much freedom for teenagers?" Write about 250 words.

Task 05

Your school has an English language student magazine and you want to write an article for it about what makes a good class trip. Look at the notes below and write about the different possibilities. Give reasons why you think one is better than the other.

• How to travel? (Train? Hire a bus?)
• Where to stay? (Camp site? Hotel?)
• What to eat? (Fast-food? Food taken from home?)
• Where to go? (Mountains? Towns?)

Write an article of about 180 words in an appropriate style. Use the heading "Tips for a good class trip."

Task 06

The local government would like to know what people would prefer to have: a road for cyclists or a sports hall? Write an article for your school's English magazine, in which you give your opinion.

• Introduce the problem.
• Write about the advantages of cycle paths.
• Write about the advantages of sports halls.
• Give reasons why one is needed more than the other.

Write an article of about 200 words with an appropriate heading.

Task 07

Write an article of 250 words for your English language school magazine about the use of mobile phones in schools. Include the following points:

• their advantages
• their disadvantages
• the discrimination caused by them in class
• suggestions for regulating their use in schools

Task 08

The following sentence is from an article that appeared in your English language school magazine. Read it and write an article in response to it.

"Teenagers who live in Australia receive more pocket money than teenagers in other countries".

Include the following points:

• The situation in the case of Hungarian children
• Positive effects of receiving pocket money
• Dangers of getting and not getting any money
• Your advice to parents

Write an article of about 200 words with the heading "How much is much?"

Task 09

The following announcement was published in an international magazine for teenagers:

Have you ever been to a party that you will never forget? Let our readers know about it. Tell our readers in an article:

• why it was organised
• where it was
• who the guests were *and*
• what made it so special

Write your article in about 230 words. Use the heading *The best party ever?!*

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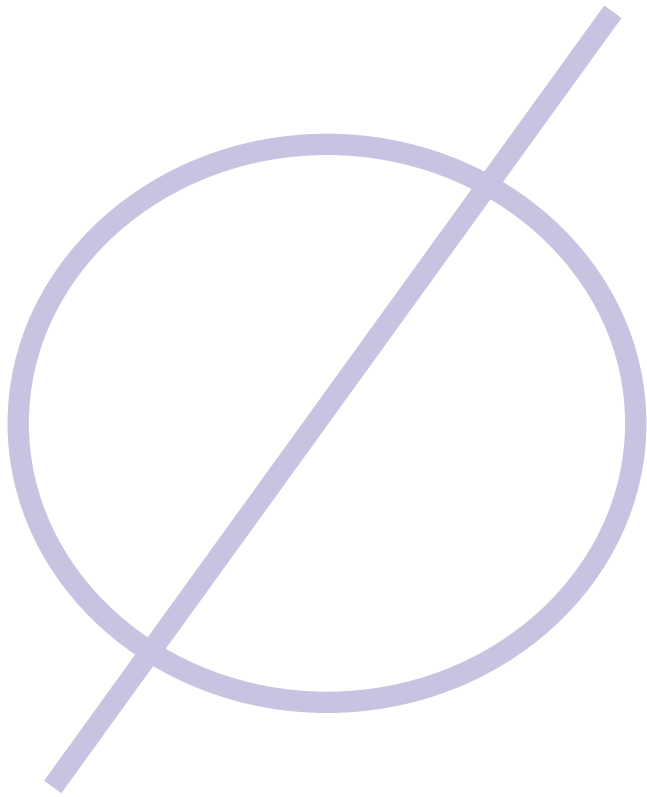
Chapter 6
Composition

General characteristics of the text type

The composition, also referred to as the *essay,* is a piece of writing used primarily for teaching purposes, and therefore the readers of this type of writing are primarily the writer's peers and teachers. The reason why this type of writing is used for educational purposes is that composition writing is considered to develop the mental skills necessary for learning and thinking. Compositions share many of the features of texts that students are likely to read in their everyday lives, so, for instance, if students are familiar with the concept of organisation, i.e. the progression, relatedness, and completeness of ideas in a composition, they will probably be able to understand more easily the texts that they read. Writing different kinds of compositions means practising different organisational patterns, such as the arrangement of ideas according to time sequence in a narrative composition, or according to some spatial logic (e.g. left to right or top down) in a descriptive composition. The collection and categorisation of ideas according to different patterns of development should help students to improve their thinking skills and are also a way of revising the language material covered in class.

Content and organisation

A composition does not have a special layout like a letter. It resembles an article in that it consists of four sections: title, introduction, body and conclusion. Each section has a different function that determines the length, content and the organisation of the ideas in each section.

The title

The function of the *title* is to reveal to the reader the topic of the composition in an inviting manner, reflect the purpose and set the tone of the piece. An inviting title is short, informative and interesting, it catches the reader's attention. It is a common mistake that students write long titles in which they want to include the contents of the whole composition. Not all examinations provide titles for the candidates when they have to write a composition. In such cases it often occurs that instead of inventing a title students do not write one, or they simply copy from the instructions the sentence that sets the topic (e.g. *Describe a party you liked. What happened? How did you feel?*) and use it as a title. Writing an appropriate title is not easy, so this skill must be practised in writing classes.

The introduction

The *introduction* provides details about the topic that the reader needs so as to be able to follow the writer, and it formulates the main idea of the composition. Having read the introduction, it should be clear to the reader what the topic of the composition is, what aspect of the topic is going to be discussed, and how the discussion is going to be developed. For instance, it is clear from the sentence *The main problem for secondary school students in Hungary at the moment is the changing of the school leaving examination* that the topic is the problems secondary school students have to face in Hungary, that the topic is narrowed by the focus being shifted to the most urgent of all the possible problems the students may have, and that the composition is a description of the difficult situation that the students have to face.

It often occurs in examination scripts that candidates do not write an appropriate introduction. They assume that the reader is also familiar with the task, so instead of introducing the topic and stating the main idea of the composition, they briefly refer back to the task and start discussing the topic. The following extracts taken from two scripts (Figure 6.1) illustrate the use of the task description as a title and the omission of the introductory paragraph.

Task:	Only one foreign language should be taught to grammar school students. Do you agree or disagree?
Title:	*Only one foreign language should be taught to grammar school students*
Script 1:	*I disagree. If somebody is enough clever and intelligent to learn two languages except for his/her mother language, then the school where he/she goes, have to teach her/him not only one foreign language. [...]*
Script 2:	*My first question is: Why? I know it's very informal from me, so excuse me. You can see I disagree. I think foreign language is very important, because if we will have a job, in many case foreign language is necessary. [...]*

Figure 6.1 An example of faulty title and introductory paragraph use

The body

The requirements for the *body* of the composition are basically the same as those for the article. All of the ideas included in the body must have one common purpose, namely they must develop the topic formulated in the introduction by discussing its various aspects. Depending on the length and complexity of the piece of writing, the ideas discussing different aspects of the topic must be organised in separate paragraphs. For instance, a series of well-developed ideas included in the body of a longer composition about the current problem of secondary school students could be organised into separate paragraphs discussing such aspects as the amount of information students have (what they know and do not know about the

examination), the necessity of having to decide between two levels (compared to the old system with no such distinctions), or the effect of the new examination on their further education. The aim of the candidate taking a higher level examination should be to write about a few key aspects relevant to the topic in detail. This makes possible the elaboration of ideas and results in a better quality composition than the one that consists of a series of one sentence paragraphs that read like a list.

However, lower level candidates may discuss fewer ideas and in a less complex manner than more advanced candidates. This results in shorter pieces of writing that in the body part develop only a few (3-4) aspects of an issue in little detail. In such cases it is advisable not to divide the body into paragraphs. In the following discursive composition written by a candidate about computers (Figure 6.2), the aspects discussed are school, entertainment, health and relationships. With the exception of the ideas about entertainment and health, there is a paragraph devoted in the body to each set of ideas that are about the same aspect. This is appropriate since there is some development of these ideas in a few sentences that form separate units together, and these units can be indicated with the use of paragraphs. The ideas about entertainment and health are closely related and neither of the two is developed in more than three sentences, so there is no reason why they should be discussed in separate paragraphs.

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Computers are really important machines in our century. Computers are more and more important.

In the schools there are lots of computers and we also have computer lessons. In the secondary schools there are special classes where the students have more Computer Skills lessons than in the other classes.

Nowadays the Internet is a popular thing for entertainment. But lots of children like computer games. I don't like those children who always sit in front of the computer, because it's healthier doing some sports. This is connected to the health issues. Your eyes become worse, you have to wear glasses and it's important to be in the nature and relax. You can go running or playing basketball or anything else.

If you have computer you can send emails to different people from the world. So this is a good thing, because you can know lots of people. But at the same time you can be lonely because you can't meet these people, only in the computer and people need a kind of company.

Computers as we can see have advantages and disadvantages too. I don't like computers but I know that there are a lot of useful thing with it. You can learn more about things in that you are interested, and it's a good thing if you have internet too. But the life is not only about computers.

Figure 6.2 Composition with adequately developed paragraphs

A shortened version of the above composition illustrates the lack of complexity characteristic of scripts written by less proficient writers (Figure 6.3). The aspects of the topic addressed are the same as in the sample discursive composition above, but they are developed in less detail and so can be written up as a one-paragraph composition.

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Computers are more and more important in our century. In secondary schools there are lots of computers and we also have special computer skills lessons. The Internet is good for entertainment. Lots of children like computer games and always sit in front of the computer, but this isn't healthy. With a computer you can send emails to different people from the world. So this is good but at the same time you can be lonely because you can't meet these people. Computers as we can see have advantages and disadvantages too. I know that they are useful but I don't like computers. Life is not only about computers.

Figure 6.3 Composition with little development of subtopics

The language learner can only move progressively from writing individual sentences to writing longer pieces. The one-paragraph composition, therefore, is a natural stage in the language learning process and the development of writing skills. It is the teacher's task to follow the development of the learners' writing skills; and once learners start writing more complex texts, they must be shown how to divide their texts into paragraphs.

The number of aspects to be discussed in a composition depends on the writers and the main idea they formulate in the introduction to the composition. The main idea should be seen as a contract between the writer and the reader. If the writer's main idea is *My favourite pastimes are reading, listening to music and swimming,* the reader can rightfully expect that in the body of a longer composition at least one separate paragraph will be devoted to each pastime. If the composition only deals with listening to music, the reader will not feel that the piece of writing is complete. The writer can narrow the focus of the composition and thus simplify the task by tightening the scope of the sentence that formulates the main idea to *My favourite pastime is listening to music.* This would allow for the discussion of one topic in detail. The reader would now expect to read only about ideas related to this one pastime (the kind of music, the times when the writer listens to music, how the writer listens to music, etc.).

It is important to note in connection with the aspects that are discussed in the body of a composition that the format of the composition tasks given in language exams is usually different from, for example, the format of letter or article tasks. There is no additional help given for candidates in the form of bullet points prompting relevant ideas for the topic or reading materials that contain ideas which can help candidates select and think of ideas for their own compositions.

However, composition tasks in some examination types define the context for writing (e.g. follow-up activity to a classroom discussion written for the teacher), set the topic (e.g. by giving a statement like: *If you want a thing done well, do it yourself*), and define the type of composition that the candidate is expected to produce (e.g. if the candidates are asked whether they agree or disagree with a statement, it means that the piece of writing expected is an argumentative composition).

The conclusion

The last section of the composition, the *conclusion,* must give a sense of closure for the reader. This can be achieved, for instance, with a summary of the main ideas discussed in the composition, a restatement of the main idea, or the formulation of a suggestion. After reading the conclusion, the reader should feel that the composition is complete: it dealt with the topic indicated in the title and specified in the main idea, it developed various aspects of the topic logically, and rounded off the discussion at the end. The longer version of the composition on computers above (Figure 6.2) contains an appropriate conclusion that mentions the issues discussed in the body and closes the piece of writing with a categorical statement.

Style

Unlike in the case of formal letters, there are no straightforward rules concerning the style of compositions. Considering the fact that the target audience for compositions consists of students and teachers, the style of this piece of writing can vary from informal through neutral to formal. The choice of style is determined basically by the topic of the composition: a serious issue, for example a composition about a historical event, is usually discussed using a neutral, semi-formal or formal style; whereas a more personal topic, for example a memorable birthday party, can be written up using informal style. However, this is not a rule, and writers can choose any style depending on the effect they want to have on the reader.

Tips for the writer

- Read the task carefully to find out which type of composition you have to write (narrative, descriptive, discursive, persuasive).
- Prepare an outline before starting to write.
- Write about such aspects of the topic that you find more interesting and know more about.
- Make sure you have a point to make with the piece of writing. It is easier to write and more interesting to read a composition which has a clear purpose and message.
- Using the outline, write the body of the composition first. The introduction and conclusion are easier to write once the body is ready.
- Write a piece of text that is complete in itself. Always introduce the topic, do not start your composition written in response to the question *Which TV channel is better: National Geographic or Animal Planet?* with something like *That is a question which is difficult to answer.* The reader who expects to be introduced to the topic will be confused.
- Don't forget to give a title for the composition if the task does not provide a title.
- You may find it easier to give a title once the composition is ready.
- Reread the composition at the end. First check its content and then correct the mistakes.

The types of composition administered at lower and higher level language examinations

Besides its educational purpose, each composition has a concrete purpose in itself as a piece of writing, namely it is written to entertain, to appeal to the reader's senses and thus stir emotions, to explain something, and finally to convince readers to change their minds or act in a particular way. The purpose of a composition determines how writers handle the topic, that is what aspects of a topic they include and in what sequence they deal with these aspects. The purpose and organisation of a composition determine the ways of writing about the topic, the modes of discourse.

There are four primary modes: narration, description, exposition and argumentation. All of these modes occur in modern European language examinations. They have a different effect on the reader and are characterised by particular features that distinguish them from the other modes. The following sections discuss the four primary modes, present sample tasks, sample scripts and analyses of the sample scripts. The practice tasks that are given at the end of each section are suitable for practice and assessment purposes. The time and length specifications for the tasks vary depending on the level of the candidates. Lower level candidates can be instructed to write about 150-200 words in about thirty minutes, whereas more proficient candidates can be expected to write 200-250 words in about forty-five minutes.

Some of the composition practice tasks are given in base prompt format and teachers may need to contextualise them in order to help their students understand the writing context and to motivate them. Furthermore, they may decide to add such procedural information as the time and length of the text. They can design their own template based on the one given in Figure 6.4 below.

> The English teachers in your school have decided to organise a composition writing competition. The compositions will be read by a panel of judges consisting of teachers and students. The winners get English books, dictionaries, posters and CD-ROMs. The topic set for the composition is the following:
>
> > "We should always tell the truth and nothing but the truth." How far do you agree or disagree with this statement?
>
> You have decided to enter the competition. Write an argumentative composition of 200-250 words in 45 minutes. Do not forget to give a title for your composition.

Figure 6.4 Sample template for contextualising base prompts

Depending on their purposes, teachers can, for example, name only students as the audience for the composition and expect that the students use informal or neutral style. They may help lower level students by including a title in the task and reducing the required length.

Narration

A composition that tells a story, relates an experience or recounts a sequence of events is typically written in the mode called *narration*. A narrative composition is written to entertain by retelling events, or it may be intended to entertain and make a point at the same time. At lower levels it is enough if the candidate can write an account of past events, future plans or a short narrative. However, at higher levels candidates are expected to be able to write what is called a fully developed narrative in the form of a short story.

The short story is similar to a narrative composition but there are notable differences between the two. The main differences are that a short story gives more freedom for the writer. The main idea of the short story does not have to be stated as clearly in the introduction as in the case of a composition. Furthermore, the structure of a short story is more complex: in such a narrative the events build to a climax which is resolved at the end of the story. Figure 6.5 below presents the outline of a fully developed narrative.
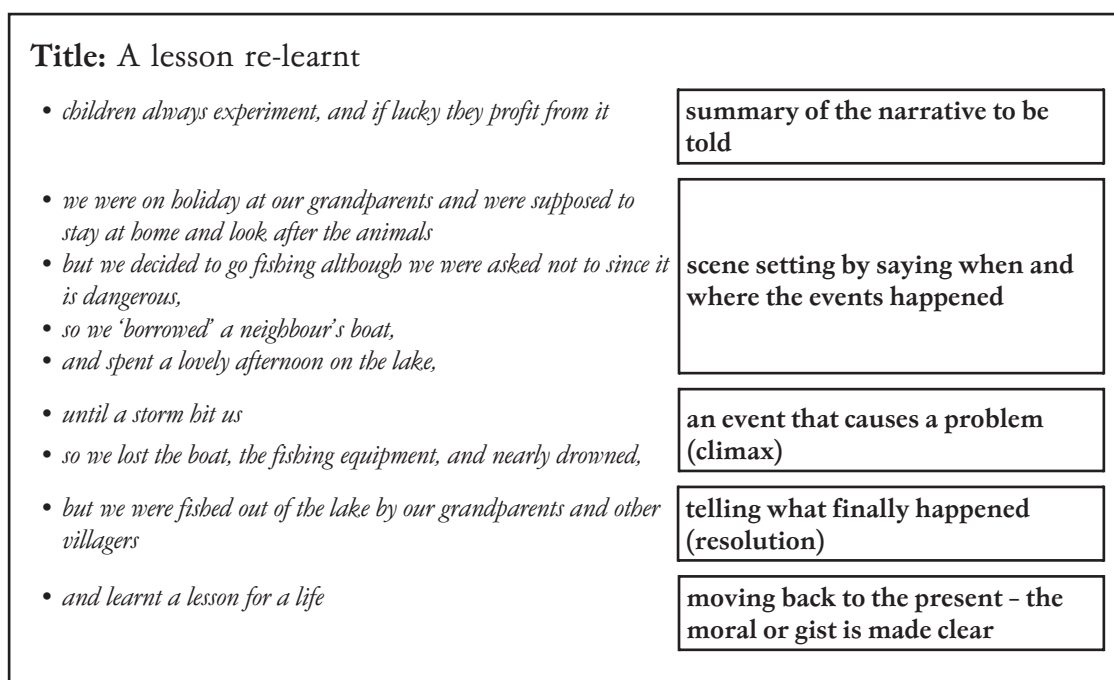
Title: A lesson re-learnt

• *children always experiment, and if lucky they profit from it*	**summary of the narrative to be told**
• *we were on holiday at our grandparents and were supposed to stay at home and look after the animals* • *but we decided to go fishing although we were asked not to since it is dangerous,* • *so we 'borrowed' a neighbour's boat,* • *and spent a lovely afternoon on the lake,*	**scene setting by saying when and where the events happened**
• *until a storm hit us* • *so we lost the boat, the fishing equipment, and nearly drowned,*	**an event that causes a problem (climax)**
• *but we were fished out of the lake by our grandparents and other villagers*	**telling what finally happened (resolution)**
• *and learnt a lesson for a life*	**moving back to the present – the moral or gist is made clear**

Figure 6.5 The outline of a fully developed narrative

The audience for short stories can be a peer, a teacher or a person who likes reading short stories. Such texts are intended for publication in a literary or school magazine. It is to be noted, however, that the short stories expected from candidates are not assessed for their literary merits. It is not a requirement that candidates write short stories of high literary value. What they should do is retell a story in an interesting and lively manner.

What both narrative compositions and short stories have in common is chronological development. Chronological development, in other words the ordering of events or ideas according to time, is the key organisational pattern of narrative writing. This type of order is characterised by a straightforward account of the events in the sequence in which they occurred (what happened first, what happened later, and what happened finally). This kind of organisation of the ideas can be used for the narration of past events (a funny experience from childhood), of typical or regular events (what happens at a festival organised each year), and of current events (telling a friend in a letter what the family is doing on a holiday). The type of event a narrative text is about determines the tense of the narration, and as a consequence there are two common kinds of narration: present and past. Telling what people regularly do at a festival requires present narration; whereas, telling a friend in September about an exciting and eventful summer day would necessitate the use of past narration. Narration is also possible with reference to the future (e.g. *If we win the lottery, we shall travel to Tenerife. We shall rent a yacht and sail out every day. We shall swim, sunbathe and fish all day and return in the evening to our hotel ...*), but it is less frequent than present or past narration. Therefore, the language of both

narrative compositions and short stories is characterised by the frequent use of a variety of verb forms as well as time expressions and time clauses.

Narration is a mode often used on its own, that is in a narrative composition or a short story; however, it can also be integrated in other types of writing. For example, a letter to a friend can have a section which is a short narrative, such as the example above about an eventful summer day. A letter of complaint can also have a narrative section in which the writer recounts a sequence of events in chronological order to justify the complaint. For example, in a letter addressed to the manager of a restaurant, the writer can narrate what happened in the restaurant that dissatisfied her in connection with the service (e.g. it took a long time till they were led to their table, the waiter then forgot about them, and minutes later he led another couple to the same table).

Analysing a narrative composition

Figure 6.6 presents a narrative composition task. Study the task and read the sample composition given in Figure 6.7.

Write a 200–250 words composition about an adventure you will never forget.

Figure 6.6 Narrative composition task

The candidate invented an effective title for the composition (Figure 6.7). The reader can find out by reading the title that the composition is about an adventure, more specifically a rafting adventure. The title is closely connected to the introduction, which sets the scene by telling the reader about the time, the location and the way the writer found out about the rafting tour. Having provided sufficient background information for the reader, the writer concludes the introduction by stating the main idea on the basis of which the reader formulates the expectation that the text to follow will answer the question: "What made the rafting-tour *great*?"

The answer to the reader's question is given in the body, which narrates what happened during the tour and provides a consistent positive evaluation of the events. The chronological order is simple, the events are told in the order in which they happened: preparation for the tour followed by a few significant moments from the tour. The writer uses simple and continuous past tenses to narrate the events and time expressions *(first, then, after that)* to show the order in which the events followed one another.

The white-water adventure

One summer we travelled to Austria. It was a very good journey. The way was very long and boring, but the mountains were beautiful. We lived in a little village near (100km) Salzburg. Our house was very comfortable. I had my own room. In this village we found a Rafting Center near Kitzlochklamm. Here we could go to a great white-water rafting tour.

One day the weather was sunny and there was so much water in Salzach that we could go on a rafting tour. It was very funny. We had neoperm clothes and they were very cold. But we could not get wet.

First we had to sit in the boat. Then we had to jump into the river to learn what to do when we fall out. The river was very cold. After that we were again in the boat and ready to go.

Then the tour started and we were sitting in the big boat on the fast river. First I was afraid, but later I was laughing and shouting with the others. It was fantastic.

On a slow part of the river we had to play a funny game. We had to walk around the boat on the edge of the boat. I fell into the cold water. All of the people were laughing at me. I laughed too. At the end they pulled me into the boat. After that the river was fast again.

I can never forget this trip. It was a fantastic experience.

Figure 6.7 Sample narrative composition

The conclusion is short but appropriate for a composition of this length and complexity. It is an overall evaluation of the trip to Austria, whose most important component besides the beautiful mountains and the comfortable village house was the unforgettable rafting tour. The composition forms a whole: it builds a frame for the narrative and gives a satisfactory account of the events on the basis of which the reader can understand the writer's evaluation of the trip.

Tips for the writer of a narrative

• Feel free to be creative in a narrative composition or short story.
• Organise the events in chronological order: tell the events moving from the first to the last.
• You can write a simple narrative composition in which you list the events one after the other in time sequence or, if you want to make your narrative more interesting, organise the ideas so that they build up to a climax: a punch line or the resolution of a problem.

Practice tasks for narrative compositions

• Write a composition about how you prepared for your last New Year's Eve party.
• Write a composition about the most boring/exciting day you have ever had.
• Write a composition about a funny childhood experience.
• Write a composition about what you did on your first day in school.
• Each family has stories about family members that are told time and time again at family gatherings. Retell one of your family's favourite stories.
• Tell a funny story about a friend.
• Summarise briefly the plot of a film that you have just seen.
• Write a composition about an incident that captured your attention on your way from your house to your school. In your composition write about:
  – what you saw
  – where you saw it
  – when you saw it
  – who were involved *and*
  – why you think it happened
• Write about the worst class trip you or a friend has ever had. In your composition say what happened and how it could have been avoided.

Description

Description is a piece of writing about what something or somebody is like. Whereas a narrative composition presents events in chronological order, description appeals to the senses of the reader in that it describes what can be perceived, in other words, what something looks, feels, sounds, tastes or smells like; what a person looks like, how she behaves, what her habits and mannerisms are. While the key organisational pattern of a narrative piece of writing is chronological order, that of description depends on the subject and purpose of the description. The descriptive composition can have a spatial organisation. Proceeding from left to right, right to left, bottom-up or top-down, the writer of a description rebuilds in a systematic manner in the mind of the reader the described scene, person or object with the help of words. The description can, however, follow a different logic: it may begin with the specific description of an object and continue with the general description of other objects surrounding it, it may start with the description of something that is usual and move on to something unusual, it may shift from something small to something big. The description of the look of a person can be followed by the description of the characteristics of his personality. Whichever logic is followed for the organisation of ideas, the aim for the writer is to recreate the described image accurately and vividly in the mind of the reader.

Language examinations feature tasks that ask candidates to describe people and their character, habits, or customs; places like towns, villages, or tourist destinations; objects like favourite toys; human scenes like a popular park; or processes, for example how paper is manufactured. It is important that the

candidate arranges the ideas in the composition in a logical manner and uses rich descriptive language. In a descriptive composition, candidates must use a lot of adjectives and adverbs that make the description vivid and interesting to read.

Similarly to narration, description can also be integrated in various pieces of writing. It can be found, for instance, in a letter to a friend (describing a new boyfriend), in a letter of complaint (describing the poor quality of a product), in a report (describing the outcome of a project, for example a poster), or in an article (describing a beauty spot in a city). (Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2 presents a letter whose dominant discourse mode is description). In examination tasks description can be mixed with reasoning. Such tasks ask the candidate to first describe something and then give reasons why he feels one way or another about what he has described, for example *Describe your favourite place in your house and say why you like it.*

Analysing descriptive compositions

Figure 6.8 presents a typical descriptive composition task. Study the task and read the sample composition given in Figure 6.9.

> Describe your favourite object in a composition of about 250 words. Give reasons why you like it.

Figure 6.8 A typical descriptive composition task

The candidate who wrote the descriptive composition given in Figure 6.9 used for the title part of the prompt. The specific object described is named in a skilfully written introduction that introduces the topic and signals to the reader that the writer's intention is to give a description.

In the body of the composition, the candidate briefly states the origin of the object before she proceeds to describe it in vivid detail. The candidate describes the colours of the object in the first body paragraph by setting up the contrast between pink and blue. She uses the cap as a transition to the next body paragraph, which describes the posture of the piglet.

The description is especially effective not only because the candidate uses adjectives and captures such details as the tail, but because she compares the piglet to a dwarf. Comparison is a useful device in description since it can help readers imagine the described object more easily.

The last body paragraph is again very detailed and interesting. The candidate manages to paint a vivid picture of the head of the piglet. The effect is achieved with carefully selected adjectives and yet another comparison.

The candidate mixes the principles of organisation generally used in description. The dominant principle is moving from the most interesting detail (colour in the first body paragraph and the black eyes in the third body paragraph) to the less interesting ones. The other principle used is spatial description *(From the rear, Under the nose)*.

My favourite object

I think everybody has a favourite object or more, but the qualities because of which we like them differ from person to person. My favourite object does not look beautiful, it is not priceless, but it is important to me. It is a plastic toy pig, called Piglet.

I was fascinated by Piglet the first time I saw him. It was a present from my godmother for my first birthday. He was a nice pinkish-orange colour, except for his light-blue night-cap hanging carelessly.

Apart from the cap, Piglet is constructed quite symmetrically: he is in a straight sitting position with his 'hands' on his knees. From the rear he would look like a dwarf, but he has a tiny round tail, which can be used as a handle.

What I particularly like about Piglet are his big black eyes and his cheerfully naughty-looking face. With his triangle-shaped projecting ears he really looks like a little rascal. His nose and nostrils remind me of an electric socket. Under the nose hides his thin mouth, grinning contentedly.

But the years touched Piglet, too. He still has its bright colour but you can find only traces of the blue paint on his night-cap, the top of which has been chewed off. There are two cracks on its front. His glowing black eyes are also faded now. But he is still standing on my desk and keeps smiling at me encouragingly.

Figure 6.9 Sample descriptive composition

The conclusion brings the composition effectively to an end. The colours, the cap and the eyes, the key features described in the body are mentioned again and described in their current state. The last sentence reinforces the idea formulated in the introduction and rounds off the composition: the described object is important for the candidate.

Tips for the writer of a description

- Write a logical description that helps the reader to rebuild in his mind what you describe.
- Depending on the topic and purpose of your description, you can focus on such aspects as body features *(build, height),* facial features *(complexion, types of eyebrow),* facial and bodily expressions *(with her nose in the air, purposeful gait),* character *(stubborn, generous),* habits *(punctual, lazy),* size, colour, material, measurements *(length, weight),* shape, texture *(smooth),* sensory impressions *(silky),* material *(wooden),* position *(inside),* physical properties *(transparent),* etc.
- Write detailed descriptions including relevant and concrete details using a variety of adjectives. A rich and suggestive language has a lot of adjectives and nouns that evoke images and feelings in the reader.

Practice tasks for descriptive compositions

- Describe your best friend.
- Describe your favourite place in your home.
- Describe the nicest place you have ever been to.
- Describe your favourite teacher.
- Describe the kind of pet you would like to have.
- Describe the ideal parent.
- What is the house you would like to live in like?
- What is life in a big city like?
- Describe one of your family's favourite TV programmes.

Exposition: The discursive composition

Exposition is a mode whose function is to present a clear and rational analysis of a topic. It is characteristic of both formal and informal writing and there are various types of expository compositions categorised on the basis of the organisation pattern of the ideas included in them (e.g. cause-effect or comparison-contrast composition). However, the type of expository composition that occurs in language examinations is the discursive composition often referred to in EFL course books as *for and against* composition. In a discursive composition the candidate is expected to write about a subject in a balanced manner by considering both sides of an issue, discussing, for instance, its advantages and disadvantages, and finally by expressing a personal point of view on it. Contrary to what some EFL course books claim, a discursive composition is a **balanced** discussion of a topic that ends with the presentation of the writers' own views on the topic in the conclusion.

The organisation of the discursive composition derives from the main function of this type of writing and is quite different from both the narrative and the descriptive composition. Presenting a balanced discussion means that the candidate has to describe the positive and negative features (e.g. advantages and disadvantages) of a topic by devoting equal attention to both sides. The candidate who wrote the composition entitled *The Computer – Friend or Foe?* (Figure 6.2) attempted to write a discursive type of composition. The candidate aimed to discuss the various advantages and disadvantages of computers in the body section of the composition.

The ideas in the body section of discursive compositions can be organised basically in two ways: through (1) the discussion of positive and negative features aspect by aspect or (2) through the division of the body of the composition into a section discussing the positive features of all aspects followed by a section on the negative features of all aspects. In outline format the two possible patterns are the following (Figure 6.10) for the four aspects discussed in a composition on computers (education, entertainment, health and relationships):

Pattern 1	Pattern 2
• **education** – advantages and disadvantages • **entertainment** – advantages and disadvantages • **health** – advantages and disadvantages • **relationship** – advantages and disadvantages	**Advantages** • education • entertainment • health • relationship **Disadvantages** • education • entertainment • health • relationship

Figure 6.10 Organisation patterns for the discursive composition

The candidate who wrote the composition on computers in Figure 6.2 organised the ideas according to Pattern 1. This pattern is recommended for compositions on complex topics that have several aspects that need to be elaborated. In such compositions it is easier to follow the writer's ideas if the advantages and disadvantages are discussed aspect by aspect. Pattern 2 can be used for writing shorter texts about less complex topics. It is important in the case of this organisation type that the same aspects must be discussed in both sections and in exactly the same order. Whichever pattern writers decide to use, they must support the ideas they include in the composition with examples and facts.

The conclusion of a discursive composition is also very different from standard composition conclusions. Having presented the positive and negative features of the topic of the composition, writers must finish the composition by presenting their own views on the topic. The writers' task is **not** to convince the reader about which approach to the topic is right or wrong, but to tell the reader what their opinion is about the topic.

This type of composition is also different from narrative and descriptive compositions in that while both of those can be integrated in other types of writing in the form of narrative or descriptive passages, the complete discursive composition pattern is rarely built into other types of writing found in lower and higher level examinations but stands on its own as a self-contained piece of writing. Exceptions are examination tasks that, for example, instruct candidates to write an article for a school magazine in which first they summarise what other people think about a particular topic and then at the end they express their own opinion about it. The pattern of development in such articles coincides with that of the discursive composition.

Analysing a discursive composition

Figure 6.11 presents a discursive composition task. Study the task and read the sample composition given in Figure 6.12.

Write a composition of 200–250 words about liking and disliking school in which you discuss both attitudes and express your own opinion.

Figure 6.11 Discursive composition task

Do you like school or not?

People always say: "I don't like school" or "I like school." But I think this question is more difficult.

There are very good things at school. Firstly, you have good friends. You can tell them your problems and you can speak about that themes, what you like. Your classmates' age is nearly similar to yours, so they look like you inside in many ways. With your friends you have many funny adventures.

In the school you learn a lot. It's often hard, and you are tired, but you can study that subject, what you want. It will help you in the life. Furthermore, if you have good teachers, who are great as a teacher and as a human, you will get "masters" from the life. They are examples for you, when you start work after you left school.

On the other hand, there are bad things. You have to work hard if you want to get good marks. You are often tired. And you have to learn a lot in many subjects, but in the life you won't need all the subjects. You have to get up early in the morning, and sometimes you learn late in the evening. If you get a bad mark, you will be sad. And sometimes your classmates are unkind because you are fat or you aren't talented in something.

In conclusion, I like the school, but it's sometimes a bit hard. I will remember my school with love, when I will be an old woman.

Figure 6.12 Sample discursive composition

The composition given in Figure 6.12 meets the structural requirements of a discursive composition. The writer highlights the controversial nature of the issue in the short but very effective and inviting introduction, by quoting the two stereotypical answers students give to the question posed in the title. The second sentence of the introduction formulates the main point of the composition and invites the reader to formulate the question: What is it that makes the question of liking or disliking school so complicated?

The writer answers the reader in the body of the composition, where she first examines the positive aspects of attending school and then its negative aspects. The ideas are neatly organised in developed paragraphs grouped around topic sentences, that is sentences that introduce the aspect of the topic that the paragraph discusses. The sentences (1) *There are very good things at school,* (2) *In the school*

you learn a lot, and (3) *On the other hand, there are bad things* are topic sentences that mark those parts of the text where the discussion of a new subtopic or the discussion of a new aspect of the topic begins. Two of these sentences, namely (1) and (3), have an additional function. They indicate the beginning of the two main sections within the body of the composition. The linking phrase the writer uses *(on the other hand)* highlights this function of sentences (1) and (3): [*On the one hand,*] *There are very good things at school* and *On the other hand, there are bad things.*

The ideas formulated in the topic sentences are supported with examples that are typical, relevant and diverse. The typicality and relevance of the examples to the aspect of the topic discussed contribute to the persuasiveness of the support built by the writer. The variety of the examples effectively illustrates the complexity of the issue and as a consequence is directly related to the main idea formulated in the introduction, which an observant and active reader can transform into the question: What is it that makes the question so complicated?

Similarly to the introduction, the conclusion is short but effective. The writer summarises her opinion about the controversial issue and at the same time shows the reader the source of its complexity: school belongs to the category of things whose value is best seen in retrospect. The last two sentences view the topic from this new perspective and provide a natural closure for the composition.

Tips for the writer of a discursive composition

- Make sure that in a discursive composition you discuss both sides of the topic.
- Support your ideas with examples and facts.
- Use sufficient support for both sides to have a balanced discussion.
- Present your own views about the topic in the conclusion.

Practice tasks for discursive compositions

- You have discussed in your English class the advantages and disadvantages of learning foreign languages. Your teacher has asked you to write a composition with the title *Learning foreign languages: advantages and disadvantages.*
- There are students who say that the best way to spend the summer holidays is to go to a summer camp together with other students and teachers from their own school. There are other students who say that the best summer holiday is the one where the whole family is together. Write a composition in which you present both points of view and express your opinion.
- After finishing secondary school, students in some countries choose not to start their university studies in the same year but 'take a year off' instead and travel around the world. Some people think that this is a great idea, while others disagree. Write a composition in which you present both points of view and express your opinion.
- Some students say that the good teacher is a strict teacher. Other students say

that the good teacher is a lenient teacher. Write a composition in which you present both points of view and express your opinion.

- There are parents who think that computer games are a waste of time and do not allow their children to play them. Some other parents do not agree with them. Write a composition in which you summarise both points of view and express your opinion.
- Big cities are becoming more and more crowded. In your English class you have been discussing different ways of getting around in the city. Your teacher has asked you to write a composition with the following title: *The advantages and disadvantages of public transport*
- People say that science has created as many problems as it has solved. Write a composition in which you summarise both points of view and express your opinion.
- Some people claim that art is useless while others think exactly the opposite. Write a composition in which you first summarise the reasons for both points of views and then give your opinion.
- There are parents who never allow their children to go to shopping malls while some other parents do. Write a composition in which you summarise the reasons why some parents oppose and others allow this and express your opinion.

Argumentation: The argumentative composition

Of all the composition types that occur at lower and higher level language examinations the argumentative composition, also called opinion composition/ essay, is considered to be the most difficult to write. In an argumentative composition the task of the writers is to express their opinion either for or against an issue and support it with evidence. Thus, unlike a discursive composition, this composition is not a balanced discussion of the opinions for and against an issue followed by the opinion of the writer presented briefly in the conclusion. In this type of composition writers must express their opinion by taking a clear stand on the issue, and each idea they include in the composition must support their opinion. Writers must prove to the reader the correctness of their position.

The topic of an argumentative composition is always a controversial issue, something about which people do not have the same opinion. The statement that *Euthanasia should be legalised in Hungary* divides society into two groups: those who agree and those who disagree with it. Both groups have their reasons for favouring one opinion over the other and they draw on these reasons if they want to convince somebody that their opinion is the more reasonable one.

The style of argumentative compositions is usually neutral or formal since the controversial topics that they are written about are serious topics. Such compositions must also be carefully organised so that the reader can understand and evaluate the arguments the writer presents for or against the issue in focus.

The title of the argumentative composition should be short, interesting and informative, but it does not have to reveal the opinion of the writer. Candidates who have to give a title for their compositions often make the mistake of writing a

full sentence in which they say what they think about the issue in question, and thus they basically formulate the main idea of the composition. The main idea expressing the writer's opinion, however, should be written in the introduction.

The introduction of an opinion essay consists of three sections. The first section introduces the topic, the second section highlights a debatable aspect of the topic, and the last section formulates the main idea of the composition, the writer's stand on the debated issue. The main idea of the argumentative composition is a claim, an assertion that the writer makes. For example, students planning their trip to a large city may be unable to decide where to spend the last few hours of their two-day visit. There are two options, the zoo and the theme park, and the class cannot be divided into two groups. To be able to decide, their headmaster may ask the students to write a composition in which they present reasons either for going to the zoo or the theme park. Some students will want to go to the zoo, whereas some others will prefer the theme park. The former will claim that the zoo is the better place to go, whereas the latter will claim that the preferable destination is the theme park. The claim functions as the main idea, the backbone, of the composition and the writer's task is to support this claim, to provide evidence for it. Reading the essay in which the writer claims that the zoo is the better choice of the two, the reader will expect an answer to the question: Why is the zoo the ideal place to spend the last few hours of the visit? The reasons answering this question must be listed in the body of the composition.

The body of the argumentative composition must reveal the reasons that support the writers' opinion. The support therefore contains facts and examples that show the soundness of the writers' opinion. For example, if writers argue that shops must not be open on Christmas Day, they can include ideas in the body of the composition about the bad effect that it has on families: while this is a time of the year when family members should reunite and be happy together, those working in shops spend their day away from their family and the shoppers are also away from their family members in a last-minute chase after presents.

The conclusion of an argumentative composition summarises the reasons listed in the body in support of the opinion included in the main idea. The main idea can be restated in the conclusion. Having read the composition, the reader must have a clear understanding of what the opinion argued for is, what the ideas discussed in support of this opinion are and thus decide whether the composition is convincing or not.

Writers often have to express their opinion and provide reasons in support of it not only in a composition but in a passage built into another text type. The recommendations that writers are expected to make at the end of a report constitute an opinion supported with reasons. For example, in a report for an international team who are compiling a list of endangered animals, the writer may propose at the end that a particular animal must be put on the list of endangered animals *because* numbers have been decreasing alarmingly rapidly over the last fifty years. What the writer does is present the reason why the proposal should be accepted. Candidates writing an application letter list reasons (present their

qualifications and highlight their skills) in support of the opinion that they are the most suitable applicants for the advertised position.

Analysing an argumentative composition

Figure 6.13 presents an argumentative composition task. Study the task and read the sample composition given in Figure 6.14.

> Write a composition of 200–250 words in which you choose a pet you would like to have and present your reasons why you would like to have it.

Figure 6.13 Argumentative composition task

   The title of the argumentative composition (Figure 6.14) formulates the topic clearly. The introductory paragraph contains the three structural elements of the introduction: the writer first sets the scene for the reader by explaining that her friends own pets; the problem she highlights is that unlike her friends, she does not have a pet; and the possible solution to her problem would be a dog. The last element formulates the main idea of the composition and prompts the question: What are your reasons for choosing a dog? The question suggests that the writer must argue for the choice she makes, namely, why she would like to have a dog rather than another pet.

> A pet I would like to have
>
> A lot of my friends have pets. Some of them have more but I don't have a pet. If I had the chance to choose a pet, I would choose a dog.
>   Dogs are like me. I like running, I like fresh air, sleeping and playing. So we would have good time together. It is great too, to walk with them outside.
>   Dogs don't need special care. They need a proper house, food, water, big space to move and you of course. Dogs can't live without a friend.
>   You can make dogs happy for a life and they can make you happy for a life. If you treat them carefully, they won't cause you any problems.
>   If you train them well, a few days later dogs can do tricks or weeks later they can open your door and bring in the newspaper. You can train them for housekeeping too, so you don't have to pay money for special defens.
>   So, I would choose a dog, because they're friendly, they like playing, they are very loyal to their owner, it is easy to train them, and they make perfect friends also. That's why I would like to have a dog as a pet.

Figure 6.14 Sample argumentative composition

The body of the composition provides the answer to the question. In the first supporting paragraph the writer argues that she should have a dog because a dog has a personality that fits hers. In the second supporting paragraph the writer argues that the dog is the ideal choice because it does not require much looking after. The argument could have been made more effective if the writer had included an example here to show that other pets cause more problems for their owners. For instance, there is more work with a fish: the water is to be changed regularly, the aquarium needs to be cleaned, the fish cannot join the family on a one week walking tour, so someone may have to stay at home to look after them, etc.

The third supporting paragraph contains a statement about why dogs are great, but it would be more convincing, if the writer added at least one specific example to show one way in which the dog can make its owner happy. The reasoning that a person is happy just because the dog does not cause any problems is weak.

In the last paragraph of the main body support is logically connected with the main idea of the composition. The writer shows that the dog is useful, and therefore it is a good choice, by describing how useful it can be: it can entertain its owner, run errands or guard a building.

The conclusion summarises the main reasons the writer discusses in the body. The last sentence reminds the reader that the purpose of the composition was to provide reasons in support of the dog. The same sentence also refers back to the title and rounds up the composition.

Tips for the writer of an argumentative composition

- Decide what position you take on the topic: you can argue either for or against an issue.
- The title of the composition does not necessarily have to reveal your position.
- Write an outline including all the ideas that you want to support your position with.
- Remember that the relationship between your opinion (the claim) and the reasons for it (the support) is signalled by the question word *why*. For example:

  > Claim: *Cars should be banned from city centres.*

  > WHY?

  > Support: *There are a lot of pedestrians in city centres and accidents can happen, people breathe in polluted air, the noise is annoying, etc.*

- Build your support using a few relevant ideas that you develop in detail.
- Organise your ideas logically: whether you manage to convince the reader depends to a large extent on whether he can follow your argument.

Practice tasks for argumentative compositions

- The use of mobile telephones in schools should be banned. Do you agree or disagree?
- "Science has created as many problems as it has solved." How far do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- What is your opinion about the statement: Students should not pay for the locker they use in their schools?
- Where is it better to spend your holiday: in a city or a village? Choose **one** of the two possibilities and give reasons for your choice.
- Only one foreign language should be taught to grammar school students. Do you agree or disagree?
- "The American way of life is all young people's dream." How far do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- Schools should not give students free course books. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons.
- Disney cartoons *(Snow White, The Jungle Book, Peter Pan)* are better than modern cartoons *(The Simpsons, Ghostbusters, Pokemon)*. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons.
- "We should always tell the truth and nothing but the truth." How far do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Concluding remarks

By writing compositions, students practise writing whole texts on a variety of topics for a diverse readership. Such a complex exercise requires substantial thinking and evaluation and draws on the writer's general language skills as well as writing skills (e.g. vocabulary and grammar, sense of audience, sense of purpose, text organisation) and as a consequence it is a popular tool for teaching and assessing writing skills.

Language learners must therefore be provided with opportunities to practise the different types of compositions. It is also important that they write both timed and untimed compositions. Timed compositions are written in-class in a specific amount of time. Untimed compositions are written at home without the time pressure characteristic of timed compositions and thus make possible the use of various resources (dictionaries, grammar books, or lexicons).

The composition types differ in the level of difficulty. Whereas narrative and descriptive compositions can be administered to language learners with low levels of proficiency since they have less complex structures and are suitable for the simple expression of personal experience; discursive and argumentative compositions require more control over the structure of the script, the development of complex and abstract ideas, and as a consequence are better suited for higher proficiency students.

Teachers should use peer reading in their composition classes. By having to write for and giving the compositions to their peers to read, learners get the opportunity to have their scripts read by a reader different from the language teacher. This potentially improves their sense of audience and indirectly develops several of their writing subskills (e.g. organisation, sense of direction, and development of ideas).

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PART THREE
ASSESSING WRITING ABILITY

Introduction

Part Three focuses on the assessment of writing skills. The first chapter describes the rating scales used in assessing writing, illustrates each scale type with examples taken from major international language examinations, and introduces the scale developed by the Hungarian School-Leaving English Examination Reform Project for the Model writing examination. Readers are advised to familiarise themselves with this chapter before proceeding to the next chapters.

Each of the next four chapters deals with one criterion of the scale developed by the Examination Reform Project. The first part of each chapter summarises the characteristic features and the components of the criterion in focus. This is followed by the analysis of a script and explanations to illustrate how a rater awards a score for a particular criterion.

The last part of each chapter is divided into two sections. The first deals with scripts written for the lower level and the second with scripts written for the higher level of the Model writing examination. Altogether ten scripts are provided for each level. The justifications and the benchmarks, the score awarded to the script by a team of expert raters, are given for the first five scripts on each level. The function of these scripts is to exemplify the decisions that underlie a score. While reading the justifications, readers are encouraged to refer to the Rating Scale, the Guidelines for Raters, the Summary of the level-specific expectations developed for the Model examination that are reproduced fully in Chapter 7 (Rating scales) and partially in each of the chapters on the four criteria.

The second set of five scripts is intended to give the reader the opportunity to practice rating. The justifications and the scores are not given with these scripts. Readers are asked to write their own justifications and award their own scores, which they can then compare with the justifications and benchmarks given in the keys in each chapter.

The four chapters end with practical suggestions for the language classroom that are related to the criterion discussed in the chapter.

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Chapter 7
Rating Scales

Subjective marking

The assessment of a learner's writing ability is quite different from how tests of reading, listening or use of English are assessed. In the latter case, a learner often produces only a word or two in response to the questions, and it is relatively straightforward to draw up a marking scheme, or answer key, which lists exhaustively all possible, correct answers. Such mark schemes can be used by markers who do not need any special expertise or training. In the case of objective tests, like multiple-choice tests, a computer can do the marking. In the case of tests of writing, however, the text the learner produces, usually called a script, can vary quite widely from learner to learner. In other words there is a wide range of possible scripts, all of which may be acceptable. In such circumstances, the person rating the script is bound to have to use his or her subjective judgement in order to assess the scripts.

However, in order for an exam to be fair, it is essential that raters' personal biases – their preferences, individual experiences and expertise – do not influence the learner's score. It is crucial that a learner's score does not depend upon who marked the script. The learner should get a similar score regardless of who marked the script. If two raters marked the script individually, they should give the same score. In other words, the marking should be reliable – technically this type of agreement amongst raters is called **inter-rater reliability**.

It is also important that the mark a rater gives to a script should not vary from day to day, should not depend upon whether the marker was feeling sleepy, or had just had a cup of coffee. A marker must not give the same script a different mark depending on such irrelevant factors. Markers must be consistent – they must have what is technically known as **intra-rater reliability**. Nor should the mark a script gets depend upon whether the rater had just marked a very bad script and was therefore inclined to give the next script a better mark simply because it was different from the script just marked. The score given to a script should not depend upon whether that script was in a pile of good scripts or a pile of bad scripts.

In order to ensure rater reliability, examination boards **train** markers, and in particular they train them to use rating scales. In addition, many international examinations apply **double marking**, where two raters mark each script, and the two scores are added up or averaged. Unfortunately, in many settings, scripts are often assessed by one rater alone, which means that reliability is extremely hard to ensure. Single marking is normally considered to be bad practice, to be avoided wherever possible.

Reliability may not be crucial in classroom testing since many teachers base their end-of-term grades on a number of tests or more informal assessment procedures. In addition, the consequences of getting a low mark because of unreliability are not as serious in classroom tests as they are in proficiency tests,

where getting a low mark may affect whether one can enter university or get a particular job, for example. However, in proficiency testing or a test that might have important consequences, like a school-leaving examination or a university entrance examination, reliability is a key issue since scores should reflect the same level of knowledge in different parts of the country, region or world. It is essential to use rating scales in order to ensure reliability.

Types of rating scales

A rating scale is a means of defining the standards that should apply when a rater judges a learner's performance. A scale is a measuring instrument which defines what it is that is being measured. A scale can be seen as a line, ranging from a very low performance to a very high performance, from a weak performance to an excellent performance. Scales are divided into a number of points, typically somewhere between 5 and 8 separate points on the continuum that is the line from low to high. These points may simply be labelled as numbers – 1 to 8, for example. They may be labelled with adjectives like: *excellent, very good, weak, very poor,* and so on.

However, the problem with such labels is that they will mean different things to different raters. Therefore, in order to ensure fair marking, the points on the scale are usually – though not always – described in words, in order to guide the marker in deciding which level to award the script.

Scales that do not have such descriptors are called **impression scales**, and the marking of scripts using such scales is called **general impression marking**. Such marking is common in traditional examinations, often using a scale from 1–5, where 1 is Fail and 5 is High Pass. However, such marking is usually very unreliable – different raters will assign different marks to the same script, depending upon how they have interpreted the label of the level on the scale.

Modern European exams do not use such impression scales. Rather they use a rating scale (sometimes called a scoring rubric) which defines the criteria to be used when awarding a level to a script.

In this chapter we will show examples of scales including the scales developed by the Hungarian Examination Reform Project and in the chapters that follow (8–11), we will show scripts marked according to four different criteria.

Holistic and Analytic Scales

There are two main types of rating scale: holistic (also called global) scales and analytic scales.

Holistic scales

Holistic scoring means the assigning of a single score, which is based on the overall impression of the script, guided by the descriptions of each level. Candidates are placed at a single level on a scale. Writers of holistic scales produce overall descriptions of writing ability and include different features in a level, or

band, at the same time. Such features may include reference to content, organisation, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. Raters are free to decide which feature will have the most influence on their decision to award a score to a script. Some may feel that in one case, grammar is more important than organisation, whereas another rater may decide the reverse.

The essays are scored on a 6-band holistic scale in the TOEFL Test of Written English (TWE), shown as Figure 7.1 below.

---

6 An essay at this level
- effectively addresses the writing task
- is well organized and well developed
- uses clearly appropriate details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas
- displays consistent facility in the use of language
- demonstrates syntactic variety and appropriate word choice

5 An essay at this level
- may address some parts of the task more effectively than others
- is generally well organized and developed
- uses details to support a thesis or illustrate an idea
- displays facility in the use of the language
- demonstrates some syntactic variety and range of vocabulary

4 An essay at this level
- addresses the writing topic adequately but may slight parts of the task
- is adequately organized and developed
- uses some details to support a thesis or illustrate an idea
- demonstrates adequate but possibly inconsistent facility with syntax and usage
- may contain some errors that occasionally obscure meaning

3 An essay at this level may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:
- inadequate organization or development
- inappropriate or insufficient details to support or illustrate generalizations
- a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms
- an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage

2 An essay at this level is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:
- serious disorganization or underdevelopment
- little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics
- serious and frequent errors in sentence structure or usage
- serious problems with focus

1 An essay at this level
- may be incoherent
- may be undeveloped
- may contain severe and persistent writing errors

0 An essay will be rated 0 if it
- contains no response,
- merely copies the topic,
- is off-topic, is written in a foreign language, or consists only of keystroke characters

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Figure 7.1 TOEFL writing scoring guide (ETS, 2000)

Analytic scales

The other type of scales used in international examinations are analytic. Analytic scales rate scripts on several criteria separately e.g. content, organisation, language use (grammar), vocabulary, mechanics (spelling, punctuation) and so on. The script is given a mark for each separate criterion and the final score awarded to the script – the final grade – is a composite of the assessments in respect of each criterion. This type of scale is particularly useful for diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses in different areas. (See Figure 7.2 below.)

Writing Rating Scale

	Task achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Grammar	Vocabulary
7	• all content points elaborated • meets text type requirements	• fully coherent text • cohesive on both sentence and paragraph level	• wide range of structures • few inaccuracies that do not hinder/disrupt communication	• wide range of vocabulary • accurate vocabulary communicating clear ideas • relevant to content
6				
5	• most content points elaborated • all content points mentioned • some inconsistencies in text type requirements	• good sentence-level cohesion • some paragraph-level coherence and cohesion	• good range of structures • occasional inaccuracies hinder /disrupt communication	• good range of vocabulary • occasionally inaccurate vocabulary communicating mainly clear ideas • overall relevant to content
4				
3	• some content points elaborated • most content points mentioned • many inconsistencies in text type requirements	• some sentence-level cohesion • frequent lack of paragraph-level coherence and cohesion	• limited range of structures • frequent inaccuracies hinder/disrupt communication	• limited range of vocabulary • frequently inaccurate vocabulary communicating some clear ideas • occasionally relevant to content with some chunks lifted from prompt
2				
1	• no content point elaborated • some content points mentioned • does not meet text type requirements	• lack of sentence- and paragraph-level cohesion • text not coherent	• no range of structures • mostly inaccurate	• no range of vocabulary • mostly inaccurate vocabulary, communicating few clear ideas • mostly irrelevant to content with several chunks lifted from prompt
0	no assessable language	no assessable language	no assessable language	no assessable language

Figure 7.2 Analytic writing scale developed by the Hungarian School-Leaving English Examination Reform Project

Comparison of holistic and analytic rating scales

If we compare the two types of scale, there are advantages and disadvantages to each. Holistic scoring is faster than analytic scoring and reflects an authentic reader's personal reaction to a text since readers often make judgements about texts based on an overall impression. However, experts warn of the dangers of holistic scoring, namely that the rater's judgement might be affected by just one or two aspects of the script, and that this may vary from rater to rater, thereby affecting inter-rater agreement.

Analytic scoring is probably better for foreign language scripts in particular, as foreign language learners may show an uneven profile across the different aspects of writing. For example, a script may have excellent content with bad grammar, or good grammar with weak organisation. Analytic scoring takes longer than holistic scoring, but it is usually much more reliable, provided, of course, that raters have been trained to use the scales. Consequently, most international examinations use some form of analytic rating scale.

In this part, we will concentrate on showing how to use analytic rating scales of the type shown in Figure 7.2, which is the one developed by the Hungarian School-Leaving English Examination Reform Project.

Additional information needed

Not all the information necessary for rating can be included in a rating scale. Such scales have to be used together with **guidelines for raters** and there are often task-specific **descriptions of content points and requirements,** which will vary from task to task. Figure 7.3 below shows the Guidance for Raters that accompanies the rating scales shown in Figure 7.2 above.

Criteria for assessment	Check	Look for
Task Achievement		
Depth of coverage – which content points are elaborated? – which content points are mentioned?		– content points elaborated with the most detail / just mentioned briefly – any relevant and original thoughts / superfluous details / irrelevant parts that do not belong in the text
Text type requirements – task specific – are the text-specific conventions observed?		– formal/informal language use – layout conventions of the text type
Coherence and Cohesion		
Organisation and linking of ideas – is the script coherent? – is the script cohesive?		– logical organisation of ideas / whether the ideas follow one another logically – clear / correct marking of the relationship between sentences and their parts – variety and appropriateness of linking devices
Paragraphing – does the script need to be and is it divided into paragraphs?		– organisation of ideas developing one subtopic into one paragraph – proper indication of paragraphs: block or indented – clear / correct marking of the relationship between paragraphs
Punctuation		– correct use of punctuation marks
Grammar		
Grammatical range – is there a range of grammatical structures?		– variety of grammatical features (tenses, structures, modals, auxiliaries, etc.) used – proportion of accurate / inaccurate sentences and clauses
Grammatical accuracy – is the grammar correct?		– the occurrence and reoccurrence of specific mistakes – bad grammar leading to unclear meaning
Vocabulary		
Lexical range – is there a range of vocabulary items?		– variety of words and expressions used
Lexical accuracy – is the vocabulary used accurately?		– words used accurately / inaccurately (meaning and spelling)
Lexical relevance – is the vocabulary relevant to the topic(s) specified in the task?		– relevant vocabulary / irrelevant vocabulary – ratio of words and expressions not lifted / lifted from task

Figure 7.3 Guidelines for Raters

In the following chapters, we will describe how this guidance for raters is used, and how task-specific requirements are also to be used by raters. It is important to point out that no rating scale can be fully explicit about what standards are expected within a given criterion at a specific level, and therefore extra guidance of the sort exemplified here is essential, as is thorough familiarisation with the scales and training in their use.

In what follows, we describe briefly how the rating scale and guidance are expected to be used in the Hungarian context.

Use of Rating Scales and Guidance in the Hungarian context

Students' performance is assessed on the basis of four criteria, using an 8-level scale (bands from 0 to 7), which is accompanied by a task-specific rating scheme. The two tasks in the Writing component are assessed separately. The maximum possible total score is therefore 56 (7 + 7 + 7 + 7 twice).

As we have seen in Figure 7.2, the four assessment criteria are Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Grammar, and Vocabulary. The rating scales are the same at the two different levels (so-called Intermediate – A2/B1; and so-called Advanced – B2) at which the examination is offered. The Guidelines for Raters, describing what the rater must focus on in order to determine the marks for a script on the basis of the four criteria in the Rating Scale, are also the same for both levels. However, the expectations concerning ideas communicated, their organisation, grammaticality and lexical realisation are different at the two levels.

According to the examination specifications, the difference between the two levels is apparent in the complexity of the texts to be created, including linguistic complexity, and in the approach to the topic. As for **linguistic complexity**, at an intermediate level candidates are expected to write short, coherent texts using relatively simple structures, while at an advanced level they are expected to use more precise and varied vocabulary and a wider range of structure, with more precise spelling.

As for the **approach to topics**, at an intermediate level candidates are expected to write about the given topics from a personal point of view, while at an advanced level they are expected to approach topics from a wider perspective.

As far as length is concerned, during the time allocated i.e. 60 minutes at an intermediate level and 90 minutes at an advanced level, candidates are expected to write 100-120 words on the first task, and about 150-180 on the second task. At an advanced level they are expected to write about 150-180 on the first task, and 200-250 on the second task, that is altogether 250-300 at an intermediate level and 350-450 at an advanced level.

The difference between the two levels is thus in part a function of the more demanding tasks at an advanced level, and in part the higher expectations of performance. Figure 7.4 presents a summary of the expectations at the two levels.

Lower level	Higher level
Task Achievement	
– range of subjects (related to field of interest) – personal perspective – uncomplicated text – simple discourse modes (e.g. narration, description) – giving opinion – stating reasons for actions – following conventions of the text type concerned	– variety of subjects (from field of interest) – personal/general perspective – detailed text – simple discourse modes *and* systematic development of arguments for and against options, explanation of advantages and disadvantages, suggestion of solutions to problems – synthesis and evaluation of information, arguments from a variety of sources – highlighting significant points – following conventions of the text type concerned
Coherence and Cohesion	
– simple, connected text – shorter discrete elements in linear sequence – simple linking words (and, but, because) – short, logical paragraphs	– complex, clear text – longer elements conveying complex ideas – logical (marked/unmarked) relationship between ideas – developed, logical paragraphs
Grammar	
– good degree of grammatical control – correct use of a variety of simple structures – local errors that do not hinder understanding – few global errors	– high degree of grammatical control – correct use of a variety of structures – a few local errors that do not hinder understanding – practically free of global errors
Vocabulary	
– sufficient vocabulary for expressing ideas about everyday life/familiar topics and situations – good control of straightforward vocabulary – clear expression of simple thoughts – some spelling errors acceptable	– range of vocabulary for personal/familiar and unfamiliar/general topics – high lexical accuracy – some hesitation/circumlocution – errors (wrong/incorrect word choice, spelling) do not hinder understanding – clear expression of complex thoughts

Figure 7.4 Summary of the level-specific expectations

In this chapter we have described the importance of using rating scales in order to ensure valid and reliable rating of writing performances. We have discussed the difference between holistic and analytic rating scales, and have exemplified both. We have also shown how rating scales alone are not sufficient to guarantee reliable rating. Raters need guidance on how to use the scales, the expectations of performance at the different ability levels must be spelled out, and above all, detailed familiarisation and training in the use of rating scales and associated documents is essential.

The four chapters that follow will describe each assessment criterion of the model Hungarian School-Leaving Examination, as an example of good practice in modern European writing examinations, and will encourage readers to try their

hand at assessing scripts at different levels. The following box gives some suggestions about how the scale should be used. Specific issues concerning the four criteria of the scale are discussed in the chapters dealing with the criteria.

Tips for raters using the scale developed for the Model examination

• When using the scale, read each script at least twice.

• The scale consists of 8 bands altogether, only 4 of which are described in detail (and band 0 is also defined). Raters should use the undefined bands when they decide that a performance is between the two described bands. Thus, for example, if they think Task Achievement on a particular task can be awarded more than 3 points, but it does not really satisfy the descriptors in Band 5, Band 4 can be awarded to this script for Task Achievement.

• A decision must be reached on the band. It is not acceptable to remain undecided between two bands, so a score of 3/4 is unacceptable.

• At first begin rating with Task Achievement and give marks separately for each criterion. As you become more confident, you can mark a script jointly for Task Achievement and Coherence and Cohesion since the two criteria are closely related.

Chapter 8
Task Achievement

General description of the Task Achievement criterion

Task Achievement, also referred to as Task Fulfilment or Task Completion, does not focus specifically on linguistic aspects of the script, but on such content and text type related features that are determined by the writing task. The complexity of the Task Achievement criterion derives therefore from the fact that whereas for example Grammar is a criterion whose definition can be considered stable over scripts written on any task type (a well-formed passive construction has the same syntactic form in a note to a friend or an article for a school magazine), the interpretation of Task Achievement varies with each writing task. As a consequence, it is essential that raters become familiar with the concept of Task Achievement and the features of writing tasks on the basis of which they can assess Task Achievement.

The components of the writing context

With the help of the Task Achievement criterion raters assess whether the script meets the text type (genres such as letters, essays, articles) and content requirements of the writing task. The features of the script that writers must pay attention to in terms of these two requirements are determined by the writing context. The three basic components of the writing context (Figure 8.1) are the participants involved in written communication, namely the **writer** and the **reader**, and the **writing product** (the script produced by the candidate). The three components are closely related and interdependent, for instance who the writer imagines the reader to be will determine the style of the writing.
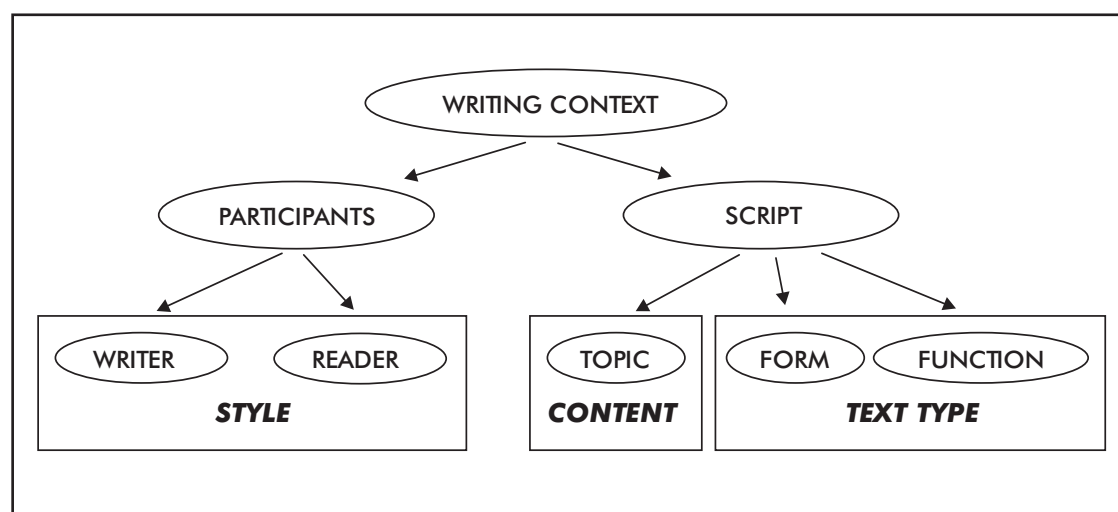

Figure 8.1 The components of the writing context

The participants in the writing context

The relationship between the writer and the reader together with the purpose of the communication determine the **style** of the text: a customer writing a letter of complaint (text type) to the manager (reader) uses formal English style, whereas a person on holiday writing a postcard (text type) to a friend (reader) uses informal style. Some text types like letters or articles can be written in either formal or informal style, but other text types such as reports or research articles are formal. Style may therefore be a feature inherent in the text type since it is determined primarily by the components of the writing context that are assessed under the Task Achievement criterion.

In some analytic scales designed for the assessment of writing, style is evaluated together with vocabulary. However, style does not mean solely the choice of formal and informal vocabulary items. For example, the use of contracted forms and the tone of the writing also affect the style of a script. Assessing style together with vocabulary can mislead raters because it reinforces the false belief that style is determined only by the formality of the words used in the script.

The script

The script, the last component of the writing context, addresses aspects of a given topic and thus has a definite **content**. The script also represents a particular text type (e.g. letter, article). Both the content and the text type are determined by the writing task and help to identify the features of the script that raters must focus on when assessing Task Achievement. The content of the script is defined by the writing task: the candidate is told what topic to address and, depending on the task type, what aspects of the topic to discuss. The aspects of the topic to be addressed are the **content points** that the candidate has to include and develop in the script. The length of the script is set so as to make possible the inclusion and discussion of all the required content points within the specified word limit.

Similarly to the content, the writing task specifies the **text type** of the script expected from the candidate. Different text types have different forms and functions. Letters, information brochures, compositions, articles or reports are written products that represent different forms. Each form has a specific layout (compare, for example, the layout of a letter with that of a report) and rhetorical organisation (the ideas included and the order they follow is different in a letter of request and in a letter of complaint). Each text type has a particular purpose which can be described either as a communicative function (i.e. whether the text aims to describe, request, invite, give instructions, persuade) or as a discourse mode (narration, description, exposition, argumentation).

The constituents of the Task Achievement criterion

The constituents of the Task Achievement criterion summarised in Table 8.1 below are based on the components of the writing situation discussed above. In

terms of **style**, the first constituent of the Task Achievement criterion, candidates are expected to give evidence of audience awareness, namely that they know who the text is written for and what their own status is with respect to the status of the reader, by using formal or informal vocabulary, an appropriate tone (e.g. serious, humorous, ironic, courteous, friendly), and personal or impersonal style. They should give evidence of their ability to use the same style consistently and to write naturally. For example, they must avoid using a stilted style because their writing will become excessively formal and pompous.

Table 8.1 The constituents of the Task Achievement criterion

Constituent	Features	
Style	Audience awareness Text quality	– formal/informal vocabulary – tone – personal/impersonal mode of expression – appropriateness – consistency

Content	Appropriate topic
	Relevance of ideas
	Coverage
	Length
		– topic set in the writing task
		– treatment of the topic
		    development of content points
		    necessary/redundant information
		    range of ideas
		– amount of detail
		– task solved within the set word limit

Text type	Form Communicative function Discourse mode Rhetorical organisation	– type of written product – layout – goal of the text – typical sequencing of information

The second constituent of the Task Achievement criterion, **content**, relates to the topic and subtopics specified in the writing task. When assigning a score for Task Achievement, raters check whether the candidates developed the assigned topic, whether they included an appropriate number of relevant ideas, and whether they discussed these ideas in sufficient detail within the word limit set in the task. Raters sometimes have difficulty in evaluating the relevance and coverage of ideas. Some task types clearly specify the subtopics or content points that the candidates must include in their scripts. Such tasks provide a list of subtopics, for example, in the form of bullet points or a set of notes added to a letter to which candidates have to reply. In such cases raters first have to count the content points so as to check how many of them the candidates have put into their scripts. Deciding the relevance of the ideas included in a script becomes more difficult when the task does not itemise the content points. Examples of such task types are prompts presented in the form of images (e.g. a series of pictures or a graph) or one-sentence composition prompts (e.g. *Write a composition about your best friend*). The rater will not always find it easy to determine the content points for such types of tasks if no rating scheme is provided.

The number of content points depends on the nature of the communicated message, and the importance of content points varies with the type of task. If the communicated message is complex, the number of content points is higher than in the case of a simple message. However, keeping track of a large number of content points makes the rating process more demanding.

The evaluation of the coverage of content points can also pose problems for raters. Whereas it is clear that adequate coverage is a function of the number of content points and the word limit set in the task, it is not easy to determine for each content point what *sufficient amount of detail* means. Some rating schemes make the assessment of coverage easier by defining what counts as satisfactory development of content points. Other rating schemes also specify that in accordance with the instructions given to the candidate in the writing task, certain content points must be more developed and should be weighted differently (i.e. two of four content points can be considered sufficiently developed if they are mentioned in the script, whereas the remaining two can only be considered sufficiently developed if they are discussed in detail).

The format of the prompt can render the assessment difficult. The less clearly the task states what content points the candidate must address the more difficult it becomes to assess whether the ideas included in the script are relevant and whether the depth of the discussion is extensive enough. If the task is general, the rater must refer for detailed guidance to the rating scheme, if there is one, or the content points must be established for the task before the raters start assessing the scripts.

The last constituent of the Task Achievement criterion, **text type**, comprises text type features. The first of these, **form**, refers to the type of written product. Writing tasks usually specify the type of text that candidates are expected to produce by stating that they are to write a letter, a composition or an article. Different text types have typical layouts, and raters must check whether candidates used the appropriate layout for the text type they produced. The writing task may also specify the communicative function (e.g. describe, request, invite, give instructions, persuade) of the script. For example, the task may state that the candidate must write a letter in order to inform a friend about a particular event. Another task may require that the candidate should attempt to persuade the city council that the city would profit more from a park than a shopping centre.

Alternatively, the writing task may indicate the discourse mode (narration, description, exposition, and argumentation) of the script. If candidates are instructed to describe a place, raters have to check whether the script satisfies the criteria of a descriptive text. This information may not be provided in rating schemes. Raters should be familiar with the characteristic features of texts written in a particular discourse mode and should be able to determine the dominant mode of a text that is a mix of the four basic modes (e.g. although it includes description, the dominant mode of a story is narration).

Rating schemes make the same assumption about rhetorical organisation as about discourse mode. Raters are expected to be aware of the rhetorical organisation of the text types tested. Texts that belong to the same text type tend to share the pattern of organisation of the main ideas within them. For example, in

letters the first piece of information that follows the salutation is the statement of the purpose of writing irrespective of the type of letter: the words *I am writing to complain about...* introduce a letter whose writer wishes to formulate a complaint, whereas the words *I am writing to request...* reveal in the first sentence that the purpose of the writer is to make a request. The rhetorical organisation of texts is taught both directly and indirectly in language course books and writing course books and raters can develop their knowledge of the rhetorical organisation of texts by consulting the sample tasks and their evaluations in the handbooks published by various examination boards.

Familiarity with the constituents of the Task Achievement criterion also presupposes that raters have a developed sense of what can be expected in terms of the three constituents from candidates of different levels of language proficiency. In the case of a language examination, these expectations are defined in the course of the rater training session. Whereas there are general requirements that must be met by candidates of all levels of proficiency (e.g. writing about the appropriate topic), raters' expectations concerning other requirements (e.g. consistency of style) will vary with the various levels of proficiency assessed.

There are several reasons why raters need to be familiar with the elements that constitute Task Achievement. Based on the Task Achievement criterion, raters can determine if a script is written off-task (e.g. a candidate misunderstands the task and writes about something else or simply chooses to write about something else). The more information the rating scheme provides about Task Achievement the easier it is for the raters to decide whether a script is off-task. The Task Achievement criterion also helps raters to identify memorised scripts. Candidates may learn whole texts and reproduce them fully or in part in an examination. Raters can also determine with the help of this criterion whether the script is complete or incomplete. Finally, a clear description of the expectations in terms of Task Achievement improves the reliability of the assessment. If two raters independently mark the same set of scripts, they are more likely to award the same scores for the Task Achievement criterion if they work with the same well-defined set of requirements.

Raters must be aware that different examination bodies have different policies concerning the strictness with which they handle the extent to which a script meets the requirements stipulated for the Task Achievement criterion. General language proficiency examinations that administer writing tasks whose context is not highly particularised tend to put less emphasis on Task Achievement.

The Task Achievement criterion in the scale developed for the Hungarian Model writing examination

Of the four rating scales developed by the Hungarian Examination Reform Project for the Model examination the first one is the Task Achievement scale (Figure 8.2) with five defined bands. From the descriptions of the bands it can be seen that raters have to check in each script whether the content points are only included in the script or whether they are elaborated, and furthermore whether the script meets the text type requirements. The descriptors thus cover two of the

three constituents of Task Achievement summarised above in Table 8.1: content and text type.

Task Achievement	
7	• all content points elaborated • meets text type requirements
6	
5	• most content points elaborated • all content points mentioned • some inconsistencies in text type requirements
4	
3	• some content points elaborated • most content points mentioned • many inconsistencies in text type requirements
2	
1	• no content point elaborated • some content points mentioned • does not meet text type requirements
0	no assessable language

Figure 8.2 The Task Achievement Scale

The third constituent of Task Achievement, style, is also included in the marking criteria for the Model examination. The set of guidelines designed to be applicable to all the writing tasks provides help for the raters concerning what they should focus on in the scripts (Figure 8.3). In order to assess style, raters must evaluate the scripts on the basis of appropriacy and conventions specific to the text type.

Check	Look for
Depth of coverage – which content points are elaborated? – which content points are mentioned?	– content points elaborated with the most detail / just mentioned briefly – any relevant and original thoughts / superfluous details / irrelevant parts that do not belong in the text
Text type requirements – task specific – are the text-specific conventions observed?	– formal/informal language use – layout conventions of the text type

Figure 8.3 Guidelines for rating Task Achievement

At the lower level, candidates are expected to be able to write about subjects related to their field of interest (e.g. everyday routines, personal experiences). At the higher level, the topics can be related to the candidates' field of interest but also to general topics and situations and their discussion is different: candidates are expected to approach the topics from not only a personal but also from a general perspective. For instance, in a higher level script written about the effects of some construction work candidates may have to write not only about how their life will

be affected, but must consider the issue from the point of view of the whole community involved, taking into consideration, for instance, the variety of reactions that can be expected.

Whereas at the lower level it is accepted that the candidates write simpler texts with less developed ideas, at the higher level they have to express complex ideas in more detail. The elaboration of a content point, therefore, does not mean the same at the two levels. Adding one or two short additional ideas to the content point given in a task counts as elaboration at the lower level; at the higher level two developed additional ideas are a minimum requirement. For illustration see the example given below in Table 8.2 for the content point *funny activity*.

Table 8.2 Level-specific expectations concerning the development of content points

Level of elaboration	Lower level	Higher level
Mentioned	*We sang funny songs at night.*	*We sang funny songs at night and everybody had a great time.*
Elaborated	*We sang funny songs at night and everybody had a great time.*	*We sang a lot of funny songs around the fire at night. The words did not make much sense, but were easy to learn and the tunes were also simple. In the end even the teachers sang and laughed with us. Everybody had a great time.*

Furthermore, elaboration must also be interpreted differently in the case of content points that coincide with elements specific to the text type (e.g. *salutation, closing, subheading*). For example, in the case of a formal letter of request the sentence *Thank you in anticipation for your generous support* counts as a fully elaborated closing content point.

Another difference between the expectations concerning Task Achievement at the two levels is the kind of discourse mode the candidates must be able to use. At the lower level the common modes are the ones considered *easier:* narration and description. At this level expectations concerning argumentative skills are reduced to the candidate's ability to give opinions on issues and to state simple reasons for actions. In contrast, at the higher level the candidates are expected to be able to synthesise information and present arguments supported with relevant and persuasive ideas.

There is no significant difference between the two levels as far as text type requirements are concerned. Candidates are expected to follow the conventions of the given text type: they must use appropriate content, purpose, layout, introductory and concluding sections, as well as register. Table 8.3 summarises the level-specific expectations in the Model examination with regard to Task Achievement.

Table 8.3 Level-specific expectations for Task Achievement

Lower level	Higher level
– range of subjects (related to field of interest) – personal perspective – uncomplicated text – simple discourse modes (e.g. narration, description) – giving opinion – stating reasons for actions – following conventions of the text type concerned	– variety of subjects (from field of interest) – personal/general perspective – detailed text – simple discourse modes *and* systematic development of arguments for and against options, explanation of advantages and disadvantages, suggestion of solutions to problems – synthesis and evaluation of information, arguments from a variety of sources – highlighting significant points – following conventions of the text type concerned

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Frequently asked questions in connection with the Task Achievement criterion

What shall I do if the candidate misunderstands the tasks and writes about a completely different topic?
Since *Task Achievement* is missing (no content point is covered), the score on *Task Achievement* is 0. Scripts whose *Task achievement* marks are 0 should not be marked for the other three categories.

Should the candidate be penalised for including parts in the script that are not connected with the actual topic?
No, but these parts will not raise the marks either.

What shall I do if the script has (major) pre-learnt sections?
As raters we cannot determine this. Tasks should be such that they do not allow for this. There will be candidates who will use rote-learned chunks, but their appropriateness, accuracy and relevance will have to be interpreted for each of the four categories.

What shall I do about too long and too short scripts?
It is acceptable if the script exceeds the word limit. If a script, however, contains several grammatical and lexical inaccuracies in the extra component, this will have to be reflected in the marks awarded in the relevant criterion. If the script is short, it will inevitably result in lack of coverage.

The Hungarian Model Examination: Lower level

In this section a lower level task is presented together with the task-specific rating scheme. The writing task, the task-specific rating scheme, and the sample scripts are discussed with respect to the Task Achievement criterion.

Sample lower level task

The following is a transactional writing task. The candidate must write a formal letter to the headmaster of a school and request information about the school.

You have a 10-year-old brother. Your parents would like to send him to an English-speaking school. They have read this advertisement in a Budapest newspaper:

British International School
➢ British international education for students aged 5 to 19
➢ Academic and personal development
➢ Foreign languages
➢ Social, cultural and sporting programmes

For more information write to: Dr. Paul Gregg, Headmaster
Budapest, H-1113 Pasa u. 8.

Your parents have asked you to write a letter to the headmaster of the school. In your letter say:

• why you are writing

and ask about:

• the subjects taught in the school
• class sizes
• the school uniform
• the fee to pay

Write a letter of about 100-120 words in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Dr. Gregg,

_____

_____

_____

_____

This task puts the candidate into a specific situation in which the participants and the purpose of the communication are clearly defined. The writer is an English speaking youth who is writing an English language letter of enquiry to the headmaster of a school. Given that the writer and the reader do not know each other and that the writer seeks information from an authority, the style of the com-

munication must be formal. The text type the candidate is expected to produce is a letter of enquiry since the overall purpose of the letter is to obtain information about the school. Accordingly, the script produced must conform to the norms (rhetorical organisation and layout) of a formal letter of request. However, the task instructs the candidate to omit the date and addresses, which are normally required for a formal letter, so these aspects of the letter form are not assessed. The salutation is also provided in the task, which means that the candidate does not have to produce and will not be marked for using the appropriate salutation form. Nevertheless, the salutation provided and the punctuation used determine the type of signing off and the punctuation that the candidate can use to end the letter. Since in the salutation the name of the addressee is given, in the case of this task a possible signing off is *Yours Sincerely,* and it must be followed by a comma because a comma is used after the salutation.

Besides information concerning style and text type, the task provides a detailed description of the expected content of the script. Within a script of a specified length, the candidate is explicitly instructed to include and develop five content points. The order in which the last four content points must be addressed is not restricted in the task, so candidates can choose to change the order in which they discuss them. The length of the letter indicates that the candidate is only expected to write briefly about each content point, which is understandable since the topic is straightforward and enquiring about particular pieces of information does not necessitate much elaboration.

However, not all the content points are given explicitly in the task. Whereas candidates are instructed to state the reason for writing the letter, which is a characteristic feature of the text type, no information can be found about the closing section of the letter, which is also a typical feature of letters that varies according to the type of letter. This information is provided for the raters in the task-specific rating scheme and it is taken for granted that candidates will draw on their knowledge of the text type and include this content point into their scripts.

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample lower level task

The task-specific rating scheme is designed to help the work of the raters. It provides a comprehensive list of the content points together with a list of requirements that serve to remind the raters of the aspects of the script that they must focus on during the rating process.

Content points for raters

- introduction / purpose of writing
- asking about school subjects
- asking about class sizes
- asking about school uniform (if any)
- asking about fee
- closing

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write a **formal letter** in about **100-120** words
- cover the content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- vary the structures of questions
- use appropriate style (formal and polite)
- use modal auxiliaries

Sample analysis of a script

The benchmark, the score awarded by a team of expert raters, for the following lower level script for the Task Achievement criterion is 5.

> *Dear Dr. Gregg,*
>
> I am writing to you to have some information about the school you lead. I have read your advertisement in the newspaper and it made me interested at once. I have a 10-year-old brother and my parents want him to speak English fluently.
>
> If it isn't problem, I would like to ask some questions about the school. For example what kinds of subjects are taught in your school? He is interested in Literature and History as well beside languages. Does he have to start at the first class or are there some more classes in the school, because he can already speak English quite well. And in the end my last question is about the uniform and the fee, which we should pay. Is it too expensive for an ordinary family?
>
> Mr. Gregg, I would be very grateful if you answered these questions. I will give you my adress and I thank you in advence.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> S.S.

The candidate wrote a formal letter which is polite and consistent in its style. However, of the six content points only five are included in the letter, the content point on class sizes is missing. The candidate elaborated three of the remaining five content points. The first of these, *introduction / purpose of writing,* is both complex and elaborated: the candidate states the reason for writing and gives the reader background information which serves as a justification for the request. The letter thus starts naturally and leads on to the second content point, *asking about school subjects.* This content point is, however, elaborated in too much detail. The candidate enquires not only about the subjects taught but about the school's

language teaching policy. The amount and kind of information requested by the candidate at this point in the letter is unnatural and off the task. As a consequence, the candidate exceeded the word limit set by the task yet failed to complete the task. Finally, the last content point, *closing,* is also elaborated. The candidate brings the letter to a natural end by the restatement of the purpose of writing. Furthermore, the last sentence serves the purpose of concluding the interaction: the candidate thanks the addressee for his help.

The fourth and fifth content points, *asking about school uniform* and *asking about fee,* are included without elaboration. The candidate put the two into one sentence and added an additional question to them which is difficult to interpret because of the empty "it." In the absence of straightforward elaboration, the inclusion of these two content points can only be considered as mentioning.

The script meets most of the text type requirements. The layout is appropriate for a letter. The information included is sequenced in accordance with the requirements of a letter of request. The purpose of writing is stated at the beginning, the request is detailed in the body of the letter, and the writer expresses his gratitude at the end of the letter. The text type feature that the candidate used incorrectly is the signing-off. The correct choice would have been *Yours sincerely* instead of *Yours faithfully,* given that the name of the person who the candidate is writing to is given in the salutation.

Sample lower level scripts

The following five scripts were written by candidates for the lower level examination on the sample task presented above. Read the scripts and study the marks and justifications given for each script for the Task Achievement criterion. As you read the scripts and their evaluations, you should refer to the Task Achievement scale (Figure 8.2), the Guidelines for rating Task Achievement (Figure 8.3), the specification of the Level-specific expectations for Task Achievement (Table 8.3), and the task-specific rating scheme.

Script 01

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I am writing to you, because I've read the advertisement of your school in a newspaper and I would like to know more about it. My ten-year old brother is supposed to attend an English speaking school.

   I would like to know more about the subjects you teach in that school, which are the most popular with the students and what kind of other subjects you teach besides foreign languages.

   I'm interested in how big the classes are and I would like to know if they have to wear a school uniform and if we should have it made or we can buy it in your school.

   I have another important question: how much is the fee that we have to pay? Because we are not so wealthy and I would like to know if there's any chance to pay it in parts. I'm looking forward to your answers.

Yours sincelery:
A.G.

(151 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 6

Justification: Most content points are elaborated. The one about class size is only mentioned briefly. The three content points are developed with original and relevant ideas that add to the communicative value of the letter (*which [subjects] are the most popular with the students, if we should have [the school uniform] made or we can buy it in your school, because we are not so wealthy and I would like to know if there's any chance to pay the [fee] in parts*). A polite letter of request written in formal English except for three contracted forms and informal closing sentence.

Script 02

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I'm writing to you in order to ask for informations about your school.

My 10-year-old brother wants to go to an English-speaking school, and my parents think that British International School would be good for him.

I would be very grateful if you can write me about the subjects taught in the school.

I'm also very much interested in the sizes of the classes.

Please write me about the clothing in the school. If there is any school uniform or not?

It would be very nice of you, if you can write me about the paying, because my parents want to know about it as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance,

Yours faithfully:
B.M.

(114 words)

Score for Task Achievement: | 5 |

Justification: The introduction is covered in most detail: the purpose is made clear in first two paragraphs; additional information about clothes and the fee is given. The candidate manages to complete the task of helping parents get information on all aspects of the brother's possible new school. Formal register with one contraction *(I'm)*. Effective closing and signing off.

Script 03

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I write for you, because I read the advertisement of your school. We would like to send my brother, John King to an English-speaking school.

    I would like to ask some questions. I would like to know which subjects are taught in the school. Only human subjects or realistic subjects, too? What kind of class sizes are in your school? Do the students have to wear the school uniform? If there is uniform, do we have to make it? How much fee do we have to pay in a year? Which foreign languages are taught in the school? Can the students sport? And which social, cultural and sporting programmes are there?

    I wait your answer, thank you very much.

G.K.

(119 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 4

Justification: Three of the content points are elaborated (introduction, subjects, uniform). Class size and the fee are mentioned. The closing is inadequate. The style is formal. In addition, the candidate mentions language, sports and programs instead of elaborating the content points. The *John King* name choice is confusing. Dr. Gregg may well answer John does not need the school's education.

Script 04

Dear Dr. Gregg,

The reason why I am writing this letter is that I would like to have more information about the British International School. My parents have read the advertisement and they would like to send my 10-year-old brother to an English-speaking school.

First of all I would like to ask about the subjects which are taught in the school. How many subjects are there and in which languages do the students have to learn them? And what kind of foreign languages can the students learn? I read in the article that this education system is for students aged 5 to 19. What does it mean? For example my 10-year-old brother in which class can learn? Are the classes about the students knowledge?

And do the students have to wear a school uniform, and if your answer is yes, please tell me something about it. And I have a very important question, what is the prise of the school, how much do we have to pay for a year? I hope you will answer my letter.

Your sincerelly:
E.F.

(176 words)

Score for Task Achievement: | 4 |

Justification: Three content points are elaborated (introduction, subjects, price). Uniforms are mentioned; the closing is inappropriate. The content point on class size is missing. Irrelevant point: asking which year the brother would join. The style, register and format are relevant to the task with the exception of the closing.

Script 05

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I'am writing because I read your advertisement in a newspaper. I think this advertisement is very good. I have a lot of questions about this school.

I have a brother who 10 years old. My parents think that the foreign languages is very is very important. They said me, write a letter for Dr. Gregg. My parents would like to send my brother in this school, but they have some question. I don't know that how many children learn in a class. My second question that what subjects do the schools teach? I would like to know that. Have the school uniform got? And my last question that how much is it?

I think if you send me a letter, my brother would go to this school.

(127 words)

Score for Task Achievement: ┌──────┐
                                   │   2 │
                                   └──────┘

Justification: Four content points are mentioned: purpose of writing, class sizes, subjects, and uniform. There is no elaboration except for the introduction, which also contains irrelevant information: it is not the candidate's task to evaluate the advertisement *(this advertisement is very good)*. The necessary questions are formulated, but little is added compared to what is given in the prompt. The last question *(And my last question that how much is it)* is confusing; it is not a clear query about the tuition fee. The script does not follow the conventions of a letter of request: the closing formula is missing. The last sentence is not an acceptable closing sentence for a letter requesting information. The signing off is also missing. The style is not fully formal, there are informal elements: contractions and the impolite tone of the last sentence *I think if you send me a letter, my brother would go to this school*.

Lower level Task Achievement rating practice

The previous section introduced a sample task and presented the Task Achievement scores and their justifications for a number of scripts. In this section another lower level task is given together with sample performances. Using the Task Achievement scale (Figure 8.2), the Guidelines for rating Task Achievement (Figure 8.3), the specification of the Level-specific expectations for Task Achievement (Table 8.3), and the task-specific rating scheme provided below, mark the scripts for Task Achievement. Make sure you record your decisions by making notes about the reasons why you award or subtract points. Having concluded the rating of the scripts, refer to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

Lower level practice task

The following is a transactional letter task in which candidates respond to a job advertisement published in a magazine.

You would like to work in England for a year. You have read this advertisement in a magazine:

> **SECRETARY WANTED URGENTLY**
> Word-processing experience required.
> Minimum intermediate level English.
> Italian useful but not essential.
> To apply write to:
> THE GIANNI VALDO ORGANISATION
> The Capital House, Oak Road, Colindale, London
> NW9 OED

Write a **letter** of application.

In your letter write about:

- why you are writing
- your education
- your word-processing experience
- your language skills
- when you could start the job

Write a letter of about **120 words** in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Sir or Madam,

_____

_____

_____

The task-specific rating scheme for the lower level practice task

Content points for raters

- introduction / purpose of writing
- education
- word-processing experience (needed)
- language skills (minimum intermediate English, Italian not essential)
- starting time for the job
- closing

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write **a formal** letter in about **120** words
- cover the content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- use appropriate style (formal and polite)
- realise communicative function: a mix of giving information and persuasion

Lower level practice task scripts

Script 01

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm writing because I have seen your advertisement in a magazine. I'm really interested in this kind of job, so I'd like to applicate for it.

I have secondary school's final exam in several subjects (history, mathematic, hungarian grammar and literature, geography and English language). Now, I'm a third-year student of the lawyer class at the university in Budapest.

I have an intermediate level of English language and a basic level of German language. I can speak a bit Italian because my grandmother is Italian.

I know you're looking for a person who has word-processing experience, but I learn quickly and I have a lot of ambition.

If you would employ me I could start work in the end of the year, after my exams.

I like challenges and I'd like to learn the English language deeper.

I'm waiting for your answer.

Your sincerely.
xy

(144 words)

Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

Script 02

Dear Sir or Madam,

I was interested in your advertisement that I read in a magazine and I would like to apply for the job.

   I finished the secondary school two years ago. Since we learnt type-writing and how to use word-processors, I am very good at both of them. Due to an Italian friend of mine, I worked for an Italian company as a secretary, so I have the experience of being a secretary. I can make all the machines operate, that a secretary works with. I could also get acquainted with the Italian language itself, which resulted in a progress in the level of my Italian. I also passed the intermediate language exam in English a year ago.

I returned home from Italy a month ago, so I do not have a job at the moment. I can start to work whenever you want me to start. I can also go for an interview in any time.
Yours faithfully,
B.Zs.

(157 words)

 Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

Script 03

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to you, because I saw your advertisement and I interested about it. I would like to be a secretary in England. I like very much this country and I would like to work there.

I can word-processing and working with the computer. I can speak English, a little bit German and I learning Italian language.

I finished a high school with very good experience. I learnt there word-processing and two languages. (English and German). For example in the school we did a lot of toppic with word-processor. I was in America for two years although it was very interesting I went to school and learnt English. It was my best experience.

If it is good for you I could start the job in September. If it's problem please tell me and I will try to change it.

Thanks everything.

Your faithfully
V.Zs.

(144 words)

Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

Script 04

Dear Sir or Madam,

I read your advertisement, that you are looking for secretary. I think I would be the best for you to this job. I have a very good world-processing experience. I speak three languages: English, Hungarian and Italian. I know a little bit of spanish, romanian and greec. I learned out to high scools. I have got intermediate level from English and Italian. I like speaking and I now many things about business. I worked three years at the biggest newspaper so I now everything about these things. I don't work for two monts because I was travelled in America. I could start the job imediatly. I don't have children so I'm free all day everyday. If I'm who you are looking for, please, write or call me.

Yours faithfully: Szilárd

(129 words)

Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

Script 05

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm writing to you because of the secretary job you've advertised in Express magazine. I would like to apply. My name's ZE, I'm 18. I left Kossuth Lajos Grammar School last year. I have learnt English for four years there and passed the intermediate state exam in 1999. And besides this I have also learnt German for 4 years. Unfortunately I can't speak Italian, but I can join a beginner course if it is necessary. In the summer holidays I used to work as a secretary at my mother's company so I have experiences. I can fax you my language diplom and the offer of the company. I could start working in two weeks time.
I hope you'll answer for my application.

Your faithfully
ZE

(124 words)

Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

KEY: Justifications and scores for Task Achievement

Script 01

All content points are present, though the candidate never specifies the job. Education and language skills are elaborated in detail; mentioning grandmother is a good idea. There is a slight problem with the coverage of content points word-processing and starting time, as the former is a requirement in the advertisement, plus the secretary is urgently needed, so including them like this is not likely to result in employment. However, mentioning ambition could be useful. The style is polite, but not consistently formal (e.g. use of contracted forms). **Score: 5**

Script 02

Five content points are included in a script of 157 words, in the order presented, with sufficient elaboration. The job, however, is not specified. The closing part is also present but it is too thin/abrupt. Secretarial experience gets the most detailed treatment. The explanation why the candidate is applying for the job is an original idea. The letter provides enough information for assessing the applicant's suitability for the advertised job. The style, register and format are relevant to the task – formal letter. **Score: 6**

Script 03

All content points are present – some mention is made of each required element. However, elaboration is mostly lacking for word-processing (it is not clear whether the candidate has relevant experience), and for the closing. Most details are given on the discussion of education – a good and relevant idea that may make the reader interested in arranging a job interview with the applicant. The letter mostly follows the order of points as presented in the task, indicating student awareness of the importance of each. **Score: 5**

Script 04

The content points are included but adequate elaboration is lacking. Several content points (education, word-processing experience, when you could start the job) are briefly mentioned. The most detailed content point is language skills. Including work experience is a good idea. Some irrelevant bits are the journey to the US and the children. There are problems with the level of formality. **Score: 3**

Script 05

Five content points are included without much elaboration in a shorter than required text. The only content point treated more elaborately besides the introduction and the closing is the knowledge of languages. At the same time, the letter contains an irrelevant or misunderstood bit (secretarial experience). The letter provides the potential employer with sufficient information. Overall the style is formal and polite though contracted forms are used. **Score: 4**

The Hungarian Model Examination: Higher level

The previous section illustrated the marking of lower level scripts for Task Achievement and presented sample scripts for practice. The following section illustrates and provides practice in marking higher level scripts. Use the information given in the Task Achievement scale (Figure 8.2), the Guidelines for rating Task Achievement (Figure 8.3), the specification of the Level-specific expectations for Task Achievement (Table 8.3), and the task-specific rating scheme to mark the scripts.

Sample higher level task

The following is a higher level writing task that instructs candidates to write an article for an international student magazine. The writer is a young English speaking person who is writing to the readers of the student magazine. The style of the script, therefore, can be casual to be appropriate and appealing for the target audience. The candidates are expected to write an article, which means that they must produce a text that in its rhetorical organisation and purpose meets the requirement of the article text type.

No Kidding, an international student magazine, has invited readers to share their views about the computer. Write an article to give your opinion and advice to other students.

Include the following points:

- computers in education
- computers and entertainment
- health issues
- computers and relationships

Write your **article** with the title given. Write about **200 words.**

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

_____

_____

_____

The requirements concerning the communicative function of the article are presented in the introductory part of the writing task that outlines the writing situation. The candidates must write an article in which they express their opinion and give advice. As a consequence, the discourse mode of the script is expected to be a mix of exposition (explanation) and argumentation (support produced to back up the pieces of advice presented).

The expected content of the script is specified in the list of content points. There are additional content points that refer to the text type features of articles (e.g. writing an inviting introduction), but it is assumed that candidates are aware of and will reproduce these text type features in their scripts. The suggested length of the script indicates that candidates with higher-level language proficiency are expected to discuss the content points in more depth. For further details with regard to the content of higher level scripts refer to Tables 8.2 and 8.3 above.

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample higher level task

---

Content points for raters

- introducing the topic
- giving opinion on computers' role in education
- giving opinion on computers' role in entertainment
- giving opinion and advice on health issues
- giving opinion and advice on computers and relationships
- conclusion

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an **article** in about **200** words
- cover the content points
- express opinion, support arguments, give advice (giving advice could be incorporated in different parts of the text)
- use adequate paragraphing
- use appropriate language for genre and audience (fellow students)

Sample higher level scripts

Script 01

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Nowadays computers became more and more important not only in education or entertainment but all the other areas of life.

Firstly let's take the most significant part, the education. You could get ECDL diploma about computers. It's absolutely necessary because it is acknowledged in the European Unio and you can become acquainted with these machines.

You could also have fun with your computer across the Internet. If you join the Net you will meet a lot of interesting people and you can speak or play with them. It can be a great fun to search on the webs. And last but not least you could learn a lot this way. If you have problems you will find solutions. There is numberous person who first "met" on the Net and now they are married and live happily. Sometimes perhaps you think that it's unbelievable but it can happen. It's so important to know about the world a lot and it is easy with the computers. But on the other hand it's true that computers are expensive. And it has harmful effects especially on your eyes and you can easily fall into that trap to sit in front of the computer all day instead of have a walk or a picknick.

What is the conclusion? I think computers have more good effects on our life than bad. But you have to find the balance between dealing with a computer and other useful things.

(241 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 6

Justification: The content points fully elaborated are introduction, education, and conclusion; health is covered and entertainment and relationships are mixed. The problem with the content points is that the ideas that relate to them are not always together but scattered throughout the text. Advice is given in the conclusion, the style is neutral, and the text conforms to text type expectations.

Script 02

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Computers are really important machines in our century. Computers are more and more important.

In the schools there are lots of computers and we also have computer lessons. In the secondary schools there are special classes where the students have more C.S. lessons than in the other classes. Nowadays the Internet is a popular thing for entertainment. But lots of children like computer games. I don't like those children who always sit in front of the computer, because it's healthier doing some sports. This is connected to the health issues. Your eyes become worse, you have to wear glasses and it's important to be in the nature and relax. You can go running or playing basketball or anything else. If you have computer you can send emails to different people from the world. So this is a good thing, because you can know lots of people. But at the same time you can be lonely because you can't meet these people, only in the computer and people need a kind of company. Computers as we can see have advantages and disadvantages too.

I don't like computers but I know that there are a lot of useful thing with it. You can learn more about things in that you are interested, and it's a good thing if you have internet too. But the life is not only about computers.

(228 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 5

Justification: All content points are dealt with. Health, relationship (both advantages and disadvantages discussed), and conclusion are elaborated. The introduction, education and entertainment are mentioned. The introduction is repetitive and does not state what the text is about. The writer's position is not clear: the introduction does not fulfil its function. Advice is only implied *(it's healthier doing some sports; and it's important to be in the nature and relax),* and some scattered suggestions are given. The text mostly conforms to text type requirements. The style is consistently neutral.

Script 03

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Our world has changed at the end of the 20th century. A lot of new things were invited, and the bio-technic improved a lot. It is said that this century is the century of computers. We can read about computers from the begining of the 20th century, but the real machines were invited in the 70's. Nowadays it is so common that it is used in education. There are a lot of ways of using it but the main way is to teach languages. The computer can help prounancing the words for even an hour and it isn't unpatient. This is a very useful way of using but there are some more, useless functions of it. One of them is the computer games. It is said that it proves the reflexes but it's only part of the softwer progressing companies' marketing.
The monitor can even harm the eye, so it's a bit dangerous playing for hours opposite the computer. A lot of secretarys lives on disability because of that. It may seemed that computers has only harmful effects, but on the other hand it gives us an ability to communicate with our distant kin. We can hear that a lot of lost members of families found by the internet. I can't make a decision of the computers. Everybody should look through the facts and decide.

(225 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 4

Justification: Half of the content points are fully elaborated (introduction, education and closing), the others need more elaboration: health is discussed at some length but little is said about it; entertainment is only mentioned. Advice is not explicitly given. The style is consistently neutral; the text type conventions are observed.

Script 04

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Computers make our lives easier. "It's not necessary for every single child to have a top-machine just to play their stupid little games." – say the critics. But is this true? Let's find that out!
Many kids have computers nowdays. But the evolution of these machines is unnoticably fast and if the kid wants to stay "topmodisch" – as the Germans say, the mummy and daddy has to pay a great amount of money for all the hardware and software pakages. So 1 minus point.
But the child has to play with something and the computer is a great way of learning for the young ones and an even greater way of playing for the older generation. So 1 plus point.
Some say that monitors make harmful radiation. Well (shortly) you can buy a TFT (LCD) display if you want to and that has no radiation at all. +1 point.
Another thing is that the kids live an unhealthy life because the sit and play with computer 24/7. All I have to say is:
"Kids you could go out sometimes and play outside games (and not with your computer!)!"

(187 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 3

Justification: Good start that identifies a problem. The content points introduction and health are fully elaborated. The second paragraph contains irrelevant information (ideas do not develop a content point). Education and entertainment are mentioned. The conclusion does not fulfil its function: it does not solve or relate to the problem formulated in the introduction. Some advice is given.

Script 05

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

The computer is our friend. It was created to help our lives, jobs and it gives us a new kind of entertainment. Most computer in a workplace are connected to the internet which can give a whole new dimention of comunication and finding articles of a question.

Computers in education: more and more schools are buying computers to teach the students how to use certain programs like Word excel and use the internet. This is where the education turns into entertainment. Children also like to listen to music and play with games and one of the newest entertainment is chatting with each other which can bring people together and can make new relationships.

The bad side of computering is that the monitor can be harmful to eyes, but I think new monitors will prevent eye problem.

(136 words)

Score for Task Achievement: 2

Justification: Only two content points are fully elaborated (introduction and entertainment) in this short script. Education, health and relationships are mentioned (the candidate uses content points as transition devices but does not elaborate them); the conclusion is missing. Opinion is not expressed – only occasionally implied. Advice is not given. The text does not follow the conventions of an article.

Higher level Task Achievement rating practice

The previous section provided practice in rating higher level scripts for Task Achievement. In this section another higher level task is introduced together with sample performances and your task is to mark the scripts for Task Achievement and give justifications for your marks.

Higher level practice task

Use the Task Achievement scale (Figure 8.2), the Guidelines for rating Task Achievement (Figure 8.3), the specification of the Level-specific expectations for Task Achievement (Table 8.3), and the task-specific rating scheme provided with the task to mark the scripts for Task Achievement. Make notes about the reasons why you award or subtract points. Having rated the scripts, go to the Key section below and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

You have just heard that ten Hungarian secondary-school students can spend a free year in the USA. They will stay with families and attend a school in Florida. To apply, you need to write an essay for the organisers of the programme. Give reasons for your application.

Here are the notes you have prepared:

- *language practice*
- *other cultures*
- *my culture*
- *new friends*

Using all of your notes, write your **application** with the title given in about **200-250 words**.

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

_____

_____

_____

The task-specific rating scheme for the higher level practice task

Content points for raters

- introducing the situation (occasion and overall reason for writing) and oneself
- effect on language practice
- familiarity with other cultures
- familiarity with the candidate's own culture (how the experience will affect the perception/understanding/appreciation of the candidate's own culture)
- new friends
- closing part

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write a **formal essay** (reasoned application) in about **200-250** words
- cover the content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- give reasons and support them
- use the language of persuasion
- use modal auxiliaries
- use conditional structures
- use a neutral/formal tone

Higher level practice task scripts

Script 01

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

There are a couple of reasons why I'd like to spend a year in Florida. First of all, because it's a good opportunity to learn English. I would like to aquire an advanced English language exam. The second reason is that I have never been in the USA, so I would like to get to know the American culture. I think it's so different from our culture, how people behave, what they eat and do in their free time. Maybe it would be interesting for them to get acquainted with the Hungarian culture and someday visit Hungary. There are many fascinating things in our culture, that probably they don't even know about. My last reason is that I would like to meet different people, make friends with people of my age from a different country. Maybe then I could visit them after I came home and they could come around sometime. It would be a great adventure to spend a whole year in a country where I have never been before totally alone and fully independent.

(176 words)

Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

Script 02

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

I would like to spend a year in Florida because I'd like to practice. I started learning the English language about eight years ago, and it would be very useful because I need to prepare for my final exam or to take my language exam. But there are other things which are motivate me. For example to become acquainted with other people from other country. I'm interested in other cultures especially the american. I've read about this culture a lot and I suppose it is the most interesting one that I've ever known. I think its differ from my culture very much and it would be very nice to travel to the USA and discover that life. And I would also like to make new friendships and to meet with different people to hear different ideas to see other ways of living and organizing life. I suppose this side of the world is one of the most exiting interesting country that means freedome peace and perfection.

(166 words)

Score for Task Achievement:

Justification:

Script 03

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

Florida is the state of sunshine. there is 'always' summer day. It would be good to spend there a year staying with families. I believe it would be good to know about the cu lture. There are beautiful beaches where can I go to sunbath and swim in the ocean. The best would be Miami or Orlando, but Tampa wouldn't be bed too. In these cites I can go the basket ball matches like Orando Magic and Miami Heat. There are good NHL (hockey) teams like Tampa Bay Lightning or Florida Panthers.

On the other hand, I want to learn the American culture and I want to make friends with Americans. If someone says Florida everyone associates Miami. Miami is like a real paradise with palm trees and skateing girls in the beach. Miami is the East Coast's L.A., I mean L.A. is the West coast's paradise and Miami is the East side's.

IF I can go there I would be the biggest fan of Miami Dolphins, so they would win the Super Bowl. In Hungary there's no NBA, NHL and NFL so I want to go there to see some matches.

About the school, I would learn much to see these matches. East Coast for LIFE!

(207 words)

Score for Task Achievement: [ ]

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 04

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

I heard about this programme and I would like to spend a year in Florida. I think there are advantages and disadvantages of this programme.

In my opinion that one year is very long time in an other country far from your home, far from your family and your friends. But there are advantages. First of all you would practice the language and you have to be obliged to speak foreign language, you can speak in native language people don't understand you. Of course you will attend a school in Florida, where you can make friends, so you will have more friends, but it's true when you will go home and you will be able to leave them, but you will connect them in letter or in email. When you are in an other country you are able to know other cultures and you are able to show your own culture.

I think it's a good possibility for everybody, so I would like to spend a year in Florida with pleasure, but it's true that my parents and my sister will be missed for me.

(185 words)

Score for Task Achievement: ☐

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 05

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

Everyone says and everyone knows that the best way to learn a foreign language is to go to the country where they speak that language. Since I have studied English in the school and haven't spent a longer time in an English-speaking country, this exchange program would be very helpful for me. I would probably lose my accent and would pick up words that I hadn't known before.

I was born and I have always lived in Hungary, so I know the culture very well. In the American school I couldn't only make new friendships but also show to the American teenagers what is my culture like. And, of course, I would pick up some parts of their life-style.

As far as I know the American school system is different from most of the European school-systems and it is almost completely different from the Hungarian. So this exchange-program would give me a chance to get to know how they study in the States.

Hopefully, also, I would get a new, second family abroad, since I would be their "new son". I know it is hard to obtain this but I would do everything for it and I am sure that they also would.

Over all I think I could only gain with this program and I would be really happy and pleased to participate in it.

(227 words)

Score for Task Achievement: ▢

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

KEY: Justifications and scores for Task Achievement

Script 01
Five content points are fully elaborated (introduction, foreign language, US culture, friends, closing). Nothing specific is stated about Hungarian culture. The text conforms to genre requirements, but there is no audience awareness: the candidate should not use contracted forms in a formal text. **Score: 5**

Script 02
The short introduction fails to introduce the situation and the writer. Instead of this, it leads directly into the first content point. It does not fulfil its function, and neither does the conclusion. The content points elaborated are language, US culture and friends. Hungarian culture is not mentioned. The style is inappropriate, and the text does not meet the requirements of an article. **Score: 3**

Script 03
Inadequate discussion of content points: US culture and friends are briefly mentioned; the other content points (four out of six) are not even mentioned. There are a lot of irrelevant details about sport. The text is descriptive instead of persuasive and does not meet the text type requirements. **Score: 1**

Script 04
Four content points are fully elaborated (introduction, language, friends, conclusion), two are mentioned (US and Hungarian culture). The text would be more persuasive if the candidate personalised the arguments (should use *I* instead of the general *you*). The writer uses a neutral tone mixed with informal elements (contractions). **Score: 4**

Script 05
Four content points are fully elaborated (introduction, language, Hungarian culture, conclusion). US culture and friends are mentioned only. The candidate further narrows and distorts two content points: US culture is discussed in terms of schools, and friends are interpreted as family. This is not an ideal but an acceptable solution. Style is not consistent. The article conforms to text type requirements but it is not overly persuasive. It is descriptive and hypothetical. **Score: 5**

Implications for teaching

The information included in this chapter is intended primarily to provide help for the evaluation of scripts from the point of view of Task Achievement. However, most of the features discussed in connection with the Task Achievement criterion also have direct implications for the understanding and teaching of a number of writing subskills.

Giving students activities that develop their awareness of the features of the writing context is less difficult than it may seem. They can be sensitised to the

participants in written communication with the sample texts (letters, articles, descriptions, or stories) included in language course books. These texts may not always be intended for the development of writing skills; however, they can be easily adopted for such purposes. For example, asking questions about who the writer and the expected reader of a particular text are helps students understand that in written communication there are more than one participant. Besides sample texts, students can be given writing tasks and asked to determine in preparation for writing who the writer and the reader specified in the task are.

Once students can identify the participants, they may have less difficulty in understanding how the relationship between the participants affects the text. It is easier to understand the importance of style if the reasons for using different styles are clear. Although language course books occasionally include brief discussions of the differences between formal and informal language use, teachers can provide regular practice for their students by asking them to decide whether a text has informal, neutral or formal style. This exercise can be followed up with the identification of those features of the text that determine its style.

The difference between the various styles becomes obvious if two texts with different styles are read together. By reading a formal and an informal letter preferably on the same topic, students should be able to identify with ease the features characteristic of the two styles. Such an exercise can be combined with a dictionary-using skills development task through which students learn that especially monolingual dictionaries but also some recent bilingual dictionaries give useful information about register.

A controlled exercise like the transformation of an informal text into a formal one or the other way round can be used with students of any level of language proficiency. Lower proficiency students should have no difficulty understanding, for example, the difference between *is not* and its contracted form *isn't*. However, such elements of style as sentence structure can only be addressed when students are proficient enough to produce complex texts.

The features of the third component of the writing context, the script, can also be built into regular classroom activities. Students comparing text types (e.g. letters with articles, essays or reports) may have less difficulty in realising the difference between their layout and function. They can be asked to determine the function (e.g. inform, entertain, complain, describe) of the texts in their course books. This may serve as a good preliminary task to the teaching of discourse modes. The tasks discussed in this chapter show that candidates are expected to produce a variety of text types and to combine various discourse modes to realise their communicative goals.

In addition to activities that develop students' sense of form and function, content must also be included in writing development. Identifying the issues addressed in the texts given in course books may help students understand the way topics and subtopics are developed in a text. Students can also be asked to identify the points in a writing task that they must address in their scripts. In preparation for a language examination, they can be given different writing tasks (in which the input is different, the layout of the instructions vary, e.g. continuous text vs. bullet

points) and asked to write a list of the content points. Such an exercise is suitable for familiarising students with different tasks and may explain why it is important to read and interpret instructions carefully. It can also be used to show students that some content points are not given in the writing task but must be supplied by the test taker on the basis of their knowledge of text types (e.g. stating the reason for writing in a letter or the introductory and concluding paragraphs in a composition or a report).

As was discussed in this chapter, raters check not only whether a content point is present in a script but also whether it is mentioned or developed. It may help language learners to understand the difference between developed and undeveloped content points if they were shown texts or scripts that contain developed and undeveloped paragraphs. In order to be able to write several sentences on a topic, students may find useful such idea generation techniques as brainstorming, listing, or mind mapping. The teacher can illustrate these techniques, for example, when the class is generating ideas together for a one-sentence composition task that they have to write at home.

Students preparing for an examination need to understand both the difference between mentioning and developing a content point, and how the meaning of a developed content point may change with the type of content point. Elaboration does not mean the same in the case of the content point *Your favourite ride in a theme park* and the closing in a letter of request. The first one will be elaborated if the candidate describes the ride and explains why it was so special, whereas the second may be written in one sentence and yet it may still count as fully elaborated.

Teachers can design with minimal preparation activities suitable for teaching those elements and features of texts that are usually marked under Task Achievement. Language course books include a large number of texts that can be used to teach students about the writer, reader, topic, form and function of a text. In the next chapter we will examine coherence and cohesion, which can also be taught with the help of the texts given in course books.

Chapter 9
Coherence and Cohesion

General description of the Coherence and Cohesion criterion

In analytic scales developed for the assessment of writing, the criterion called *organisation* refers to the arrangement of ideas and the relationship within them in a script. Organisation is an umbrella term for a number of features of a script, namely **coherence**, **unity** and **cohesion**, and as a consequence the organisation criterion is also often labelled as Coherence and Cohesion.

Coherence

Coherence refers to the logical progression of the ideas from the beginning to the end of a script or a paragraph. In a coherent text, each paragraph leads into another paragraph and each idea within a paragraph leads into the next idea. If a script is coherent, the reader does not have to stop and reread it in order to understand the connection between its sentences or paragraphs.

The logical arrangement of the ideas varies according to the writer's purpose. If the writer wants to tell a story, the most logical pattern in which the ideas can be organised is determined by chronological order. In a narration the writer can proceed most naturally from the first event to the last in the order in which the events occurred. If the writer wants to compare two types of bicycles, one possible way of organising the comparison would be to describe them feature by feature (e.g. number of gears for bicycle A, number of gears for bicycle B; weight of bicycle A, weight of bicycle B).

There are a large number of organisational patterns that can be grouped into three categories: those that are determined by the discourse mode of the script (e.g. time sequence in narration/process description, or spatial organisation in a description); those that are determined by the nature of the information included in the script (e.g. order of importance: most important information first, least important last; level of specificity: information presented by moving from general-to-specific); and those that are determined by the method of development (question-answer: posing a question first and providing an answer to it; problem-solution: stating the problem and proposing a solution for it). These patterns of organisation are taught both implicitly and explicitly in language course books and in special course books designed to improve writing skills.

Coherence is thus a quality of the script that derives from the relationship between the ideas expressed in its sentences and paragraphs. However, a reader cannot determine if the script is coherent only by looking at it because the logic according to which the ideas are organised is not visible. It is through reading and interpreting sentence after sentence and paragraph after paragraph that the reader understands the relationships that hold between them. Nevertheless, the logic of a *coherent* script can be made visible. The writer can use **transition words** *(therefore,*

consequently, however) or **phrases** *(on the one hand/on the other hand, to begin with, as a consequence)* to indicate the nature of the connection between two sentences or paragraphs (for further examples of transition words and phrases see Table 9.1).

Table 9.1. Transition words

Time	afterward, as soon as, before, meanwhile, then, until, after a few hours
Sequence	first, ... second, ... third ..., next, last, finally
Addition	and, besides, furthermore, also, moreover, in addition
Result	so, as a result, therefore, as a consequence
Comparison	also, in comparison, similarly
Contrast	although, even though, in contrast, however, whereas, on the one hand/on the other hand
Concession	naturally, of course, yet
Conclusion/Summary	therefore, so, in brief, summing up, in conclusion
Illustration/Exemplification	for example, for instance, to illustrate, that is, namely

For instance, readers interpret the following two sentences

   He was a bully. All the children avoided him.

as sentences describing a causal relationship that can be reformulated as

   Because he was a bully (CAUSE)*, all the children avoided him* (EFFECT).

since they know that the meaning of the word "bully" is "a person who uses their strength or power to frighten or hurt weaker people". Although the relationship between the two sentences is straightforward, the writer may decide to help the reader by marking it overtly with the use of a transition word that indicates the nature of the relationship.

   He was a bully. Therefore, all the children avoided him.

   It is to be noted that a well-organised script can be perfectly coherent even if it does not contain any transition words or phrases, and that a script that is full of transition words is not necessarily coherent. The use of transition words does not transform an incoherent text into a coherent one. Moreover, the overuse of transition words can result in a script that reads very artificially.

Unity

Similarly to coherence, unity is a feature that contributes to the smooth flow of the ideas and is usually assessed together with coherence. Each script develops a main topic and the paragraphs within the script develop the subtopics of the main topic.

If the main topic of a descriptive composition is a friend, the subtopics developed in the composition may be the following:

paragraph 1: description of how the writer met the friend
paragraph 2: description of the friend's physical characteristics
paragraph 3: description of the friend's psychological characteristics
…

All of the paragraphs develop a particular aspect or subtopic of the main topic, the reader is given additional information about the described person in each paragraph and thus can slowly build a mental picture of the writer's friend.

All the sentences within a unified paragraph develop the topic of the paragraph. In the above example in a unified *paragraph 1* the reader would find out about the time and place when the writer and the friend met. A unified *paragraph 2* would reveal information about the looks and build of the friend. A paragraph is thus unified if all the sentences relate to the topic of the paragraph, and a script is unified if all the paragraphs develop one main topic.

A script whose paragraphs do not develop the main topic or whose paragraphs consist of sentences that do not develop the same subtopic lacks unity. For instance, if the writer of the descriptive composition discussed above includes in the composition a paragraph describing her own family and this description is not relevant in any way to the description of the friend, the script will lack unity because one of the paragraphs develops an irrelevant subtopic. Correspondingly, if irrelevant sentences are included in a paragraph, the paragraph will lack unity. For instance, if the topic of the paragraph is *Mary's generosity* and the ideas developed in the paragraph are that she always shares her food with her classmates and does not expect anything in return, does not mind spending her free time practising maths with weak students, etc., the paragraph is unified since the ideas give examples that illustrate Mary's generosity. The inclusion in this paragraph of the idea that Mary plans to live in Australia when she grows up would disrupt unity.

Unity therefore contributes to the coherence of the script. Reading a script in which the ideas do not follow in logical order, or reading a script in which one or more ideas are not related to the main topic lead to the same result: the continuity in the smooth flow of the text is broken and readers lose their way. As a consequence, raters should take into account both the flaws in the scripts that affect unity and the coherence problems when they rate a script for coherence.

Cohesion

The third organisational feature of a script that raters assess is cohesion. Cohesion is the explicit marking of the grammatical and lexical relationships between the parts of a sentence, between sentences, or between paragraphs. Cohesion can be established with several techniques of which the three that are most relevant to writing are **reference**, **conjunction** and **lexical chains**.

Reference can be realised with the use of personal or possessive pronouns,

demonstratives and comparatives. It establishes a link within a sentence or between two or more sentences by connecting specific words in them. For instance, the connection between the following two sentences

I saw a <u>cow</u> yesterday. <u>It</u> was black.

is realised by the personal pronoun *it* which refers back to *cow* in the first sentence (anaphoric reference). *It* could be replaced with the words *the cow*. The same kind of relationship can be realised with a possessive pronoun as in

They have a yellow <u>house</u>. <u>Ours</u> is light brown.

where *ours* refers back to the word *house* in the previous sentence.

The writer may not only refer back to something mentioned earlier, but may point forward to another word or phrase to be used later. For example, in the following sentences

<u>It</u> is interesting <u>to read about adventures</u>.
I couldn't believe <u>it</u>. My parents <u>bought me the red skates</u>.

the pronoun *it* refers to something that comes later in the same or a subsequent sentence (cataphoric reference).

Reference realised with determiners or comparatives follows the same logic. For example, in the following sentences

My friends were sitting in the <u>last carriage</u>. I decided to go <u>there</u> and tell them a joke.
<u>Two days</u> are not enough for the first class trip. <u>More time</u> is needed for the pupils to get to know each other.

the demonstrative pronoun *there* refers back to *last carriage* and the comparative *more* points back to *two days* and thus connects the two sentences.

Conjunction is another way of realising cohesion. Co-ordinating conjunctions *(and, or, but)* connect words, phrases and clauses; adverbial connectors *(firstly, secondly, moreover, therefore, in conclusion, as a consequence)* connect clauses, sentences and paragraphs.

She loves tea <u>but</u> can't stand coffee.
She is rich. <u>As a consequence</u>, she has many fair-weather friends.

Whereas co-ordinating conjunctions and adverbial connectors link similar linguistic units (e.g. clauses), subordinating conjunctions *(because, that, unless, when)* link independent and dependent clauses.

She left <u>because</u> it started to rain.
We arrived <u>when</u> the concert ended.

If you open the window, the mosquitoes will eat you alive.

Lexical repetition, the use of the same word, a synonym or near synonym, or of a general word that refers to the same thing in different sentences can also establish cohesion through the creation of lexical chains that reiterate key words and concepts throughout the script.

My <u>nephew</u> is five. The <u>little rascal</u> will only eat ice cream.

In these two sentences *nephew* and *little rascal* refer to the same boy who is five years old and is very fond of ice cream. *Little rascal* refers to but also adds to the meaning of *nephew,* and thus a connection is set up across the two sentences. In the sentences

In the evening I put the <u>roses</u> and the fir branches in the vase that I found in the corner of the room.
By then the <u>flowers</u> started to wither.
You can't shoot that <u>American bald eagle</u>. The <u>bird</u> is protected.

the words *roses* and *flowers* refer to the same plants and the words *American bald eagle* and *bird* to the same type of creature. The link between the sentences is established by the logical connection between these words: the rose is a type of flower and the bald eagle is a kind of bird.

There are two more techniques with which cohesion can be realised. Although both of them are more frequent in speech, they can also be used in writing. **Substitution** and **ellipsis** are closely related in that in both cases one or more words are replaced in the sentence. In the case of substitution the words typically used to replace other word(s) are *one, do,* or *so.*

My sister likes American <u>pop groups</u>. I like Hungarian <u>ones</u>.
Girls <u>like music classes</u>. Most boys <u>don't</u>.
Is this the type of behaviour that should be encouraged? Let's hope nobody thinks <u>so</u>.

In these sentences, *ones* and *don't* replace *pop groups* and *like music classes* in the preceding sentences, and *so* stands for the whole idea formulated in the preceding question. In the case of ellipsis, the words referred to are replaced with nothing.

The girl went to the table and (she) picked up the book.
I am as good a dancer as any of my sisters (are).

In these two sentences the personal pronoun *she* and the verb *are* are omitted, yet the sentences can be understood because the missing words have already been mentioned and consequently are unnecessary.

The cohesive techniques discussed above unify the script and make it easier to read. The efficient use of these techniques makes it possible for the writer to

construct sentences of varying lengths; to show to the reader the connection between sentences and paragraphs; and to avoid unnecessary repetition of words, sentences, or even paragraphs. The orderly arrangement and connection of ideas at sentence-, paragraph- and script-level result in a clear piece of writing. Skilful reference makes the flow of ideas easy to follow, the correct use of conjunctions indicates clearly the structure of the text, and lexical chains maintain topic continuity. The use of substitution and ellipsis results in natural and smoothly flowing text.

Punctuation

Punctuation in some rating scales is part of the Accuracy criterion, but it can be argued that it is more closely related to the Coherence and Cohesion criterion. In the same way that pauses and intonation help listeners to understand speech, and the layout or graphic division of a text into various functional units (addresses, titles, headings, paragraphs) indicate text structure, punctuation separates parts of a script by showing where one set of ideas ends and where the next begins, and how the parts of the script are related to one another. Without punctuation marks writing would become an incomprehensible flow of words.

A sentence without punctuation marks is difficult to interpret. The following sentence

Tom who is seven goes to a primary school in the village Jane who is fifteen commutes every day to a nearby town.

can be understood with much less effort if the reader adds the missing punctuation marks:

Tom, who is seven, goes to a primary school in the village; Jane, who is fifteen, commutes every day to a nearby town.

The semicolon shows that two closely related clauses are connected. The commas within the clauses indicate that additional information is given about the two people mentioned.

Punctuation marks have clear functions, so they make it easier for readers to understand a script. For example, the colon (:) indicates that a list or an explanation follows. In the sentence

You can choose from four drinks: coffee, tea, milk or soda.

the colon introduces a list, whereas in the sentence

Babies are similar to very old people in a number of ways: they do not have teeth and depend on the people around them.

the colon precedes an explanation.

However, punctuation marks not only separate a string of words but can change the meaning of a sentence. For instance, the following pairs of sentences consist of the same words and are grammatically correct, but the sentences in each pair have different meanings.

a

The woman said John is ill.
The woman, said John, is ill.

b

The Smiths have a son who is a cook.
The Smiths have a son, who is a cook.

In example **a** the first sentence means that it is John who is ill, whereas the second sentence means that it is the woman who is ill. Similarly, the comma in example **b** changes the meaning of the sentence. The sentence without the comma means that the Smiths have at least two sons, one of whom is a cook. The second sentence means that they have only one son, and he happens to be a cook.

Punctuation is directly related to meaning and if readers cannot make sense of the script because they cannot determine which words go together, where one idea finishes and the next begins, what the relationships between the sentences are, or what the exact meaning of a sentence is, they will consider the script incoherent.

The Coherence and Cohesion criterion in the scale developed for the Hungarian Model writing examination

The second criterion in the writing scale developed by the Hungarian Examination Reform Project for the Model examination is called Coherence and Cohesion (Figure 9.1). The bands with descriptors explicitly instruct raters to assess the sentence and paragraph-level coherence and cohesion of the scripts. In other words, raters must check whether the ideas follow logically within each paragraph and whether the paragraphs follow one another meaningfully. They should check furthermore whether the relationship between the ideas is marked with a variety of appropriate transition words that play a genuine role in making the script more understandable.

In the guidelines accompanying the writing scale (Figure 9.2), raters are given a detailed description of what they have to check in the scripts in terms of the aspects included in the definitions of the bands. Besides coherence and cohesion, the guidelines also specify that raters must take into consideration punctuation and the layout of paragraphs.

As in the case of the Task Achievement criterion, raters can use the same scale and guidelines to assess the coherence and cohesion of scripts written by both lower and higher level candidates. The requirements regarding each level are explained in the level-specific expectations (Table 9.2).

	Coherence and Cohesion
7	• fully coherent text • cohesive on both sentence and paragraph level
6	
5	• good sentence-level cohesion • some paragraph-level coherence and cohesion
4	
3	• some sentence-level cohesion • frequent lack of paragraph-level coherence and cohesion
2	
1	• lack of sentence- and paragraph-level cohesion • text not coherent
0	no assessable language

Figure 9.1 The Coherence and Cohesion Scale

At the lower level, candidates are expected to produce simple texts that consist of short sentences connected with simple linking words *(and, but, because)*. Depending on the text type and the level of development of the ideas, a lower level script can be written in one block or in separate paragraphs. Even if there is little development of ideas, it is expected that the introductory and concluding sections are set apart from the main part, the body, of the script.

Check	Look for
Organisation and linking of ideas – is the script coherent? – is the script cohesive?	– logical organisation of ideas / whether the ideas follow one another logically – clear / correct marking of the relationship between sentences and their parts – variety and appropriateness of linking devices
Paragraphing – does the script need to be and is it divided into paragraphs?	– organisation of ideas developing one subtopic into one paragraph – proper indication of paragraphs: block or indented – clear / correct marking of the relationship between paragraphs
Punctuation	– correct use of punctuation marks

Figure 9.2 Guidelines for rating Coherence and Cohesion

Table 9.2 Level-specific expectations for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion

Lower level	Higher level
– simple, connected text – shorter discrete elements in linear sequence – simple linking words *(and, but, because)* – short, logical paragraphs	– complex, clear text – longer elements conveying complex ideas – logical (marked/unmarked) relationship between ideas – developed, logical paragraphs

At the higher level, where the scripts are longer and more complex, candidates are expected to produce clear scripts in which the relationship between the ideas is established with the logical organisation of the ideas and the use of transition markers. Given that at this level the ideas must be developed in detail, each content point should be discussed in a separate paragraph that forms a thought unit on its own. More proficient writers communicating complex ideas should alternate correctly punctuated simple and complex sentences in order to convey the intended message successfully.

Frequently asked questions in connection with the Coherence and Cohesion criterion

What shall I do if the original order of the content points has been changed?
There is no penalty for changing the order if the script is logical. See if the script becomes even more logical or determine whether this change resulted from some point the candidate aimed to communicate.

What if the script is organised in paragraphs, but there is little coherence in them and no connection between them?
Depending on sentence-level cohesion, it could be awarded 2 or 3. The paragraph, as merely a visual form of text, is not a positive feature in itself.

What shall I do if the candidate is using paragraphs that are not indented?
Block paragraphs are also fine. The script must contain either block or indented paragraphs throughout. The two forms should not be alternated within one script.

What shall I do if the candidate is using the same linking devices over and over again?
A variety of linking devices are expected, so repetition is to be penalised.

Do students always have to use linking devices to achieve cohesion?
They do not. Vocabulary (e.g. synonyms, antonyms, and pronouns) can make sentences and paragraphs cohesive. In fact, too many transitional phrases can make a script artificial.

The Hungarian Model Examination: Lower level

This section introduces a sample lower level task together with its task-specific rating scheme and sample scripts, which are discussed in terms of the aspects assessed under the Coherence and Cohesion criterion.

Sample lower level task

The following lower level task is an informal transactional letter writing task.

BORGATA
thermal bath
lunch
many people

SÜMEG
1.5 hours in
castle

8 a.m.

KESZTHELY

KIS-BALATON
birdwatching
photos

tired!

Write a **letter** of about **120 words** on the lines.
Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Chris,

_____

_____

_____

The candidate must write an account of a day trip using the information given in the rubrics in a variety of forms: instructions, an illustration of the itinerary, and key words added to the illustration.

The content and the discourse mode(s) of a letter vary with the task and letter type. The dominant discourse mode of the script prompted by the above task is narration, more specifically past narration because the candidate is expected to give an account of one day spent in the countryside prior to the time of writing. Therefore, the organising principle which lower level candidates are expected to use is simple chronological order: the candidate proceeds from the first event of the day to the last in the order in which they occurred. The transitions used to mark the connection between ideas and paragraphs can be expected to be mainly time phrases.

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample lower level task

The task-specific rating scheme designed for the writing task contains implicit and explicit information concerning those aspects of the scripts that raters must consider when assessing coherence and cohesion. The list of content points (see *Content points for raters* given below) is relevant not only for the Task Achievement but also for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion because it presents the simplest organisation plan of the subtopics to be developed in the script. Candidates may be able to alter the order set by the task if the nature of the content allows. For instance, while the order of the stages in a process description should not be altered for fear that the reader fails to follow the description, contrary to what the above narrative task suggests, candidates may choose to describe first the internal characteristics of a person rather than the external ones and still manage to produce a fully coherent script.

Content points for raters

- introduction (on holiday at Lake Balaton)
- starting out for the trip (time, by car)
- Sümeg (castle, time)
- Borgáta (thermal bath, lunch, many people)
- Kis-Balaton (bird-watching, photos)
- way home (tired, rain)
- closing phrase

In the list of requirements the expectations concerning the coherence and cohesion of the script are stated explicitly. The script must be divided into paragraphs, and it must present the ideas in a logical order suitable for the discourse mode.

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an informal letter of 120 words
- use friendly style and register
- cover content points
- use clear paragraphs (clear thought units)
- present ideas in logical order (time sequence used as organisation tool)
- produce a narrative text (solid use of past tense forms; possible use of other tense e.g. for setting the scene; time expressions; possible use of auxiliaries e.g. *had to,* etc.)
- use some descriptive adjectives and adverbs

Sample analysis of a script

In the following lower level script the candidate made skilful use of various devices in order to construct a highly coherent and cohesive letter.

> **Dear Chris,**
>
> How are you? I'm fine and just got home. I spent two weeks in Keszthely at Lake Balaton. It was good, very, very good! I was there with my family.
>
> We had a day trip on a Sunday. We got up at 7 o'clock, and after a quick breakfast we left Keszthely at 8 am. We went to Sümeg and spent one and a half hours in the castle. It was old and beautiful. We drunk a coffee there and then we left.
>
> We arrived in Borgáta at about 12 o'clock. We had a long bath in Borgáta's thermal water, and after a refreshing shower we had a delicious lunch at a restaurant. There were many people who wanted to eat, so the waiter was very busy!
>
> We left Borgáta at 3 o'clock and went to the Kis-Balaton, where we could see many coloured birds at the lake. I took many photos. I'll show them next time! We left after the birdwatching. We were tired and a summer rain caught us , but finally we arrived in Keszthely!
>
> Tell me about your holiday. When do you start school?
>
> See you soon,
> Tom

The letter is divided into paragraphs that clearly show where one thought unit ends and the next begins. Except for the first and last paragraphs, which open and close the letter, the body of the script is divided according to the places visited during the day. Each paragraph presents one section of the trip.

The script presents the trip coherently, following the logic suggested by the illustration. The organising principle of narration, chronological order, functions as the backbone that holds the script together. The candidate constructs the script around the timeline *on a Sunday – at 7 o'clock – at 8 am – one and a half hours – at about 12 o'clock – at 3 o'clock* and *finally,* so it has a clear structure that can be followed easily. Furthermore, the account is provided with a frame: the candidate mentions the name of the town (Keszthely), which functions both as a departure point and final destination, at the beginning and at the end of the account.

Of the five types of cohesion discussed in the first part of this chapter, the candidate uses four. There are several references within the script to words mentioned earlier (anaphoric reference). For instance, in Paragraph 1 the pronoun *it* refers back to *spent two weeks,* and the demonstrative *there* refers back to *Keszthely*. In Paragraph 2 the pronoun *we* refers back to *I* and *family*.

Although the candidate is not consistent in its use, the script contains some

examples of cohesion realised by means of ellipsis. For example, in Paragraphs 2 and 4 in the sentences

> *We went to Sümeg and spent one and a half hours in the castle.*
> *We left Borgáta at 3 o'clock and went to the Kis-Balaton, where we could see many coloured birds at the lake.*

the candidate skilfully avoids the unnecessary repetition of the pronoun *we*: in both cases two clauses with a common subject are connected with a co-ordinating pronoun which can be omitted in the second clause. The omission of the subject in the second clause results in a text that reads more naturally. However, the candidate does not use this technique consistently. In a sentence at the end of Paragraph 2

> *We drunk a coffee there and then <u>we</u> left.*

the subject is repeated unnecessarily.

The candidate also makes good use of conjunctions. There are in the script a few simple co-ordinating conjunctions *(and, but, so)* and adverbs of time *(after, then)* that provide a smooth transition from one sentence to another.

> *I'm fine <u>and</u> just got home.*
> *There were many people who wanted to eat, <u>so</u> the waiter was very busy!*
> *We were tired and a summer rain caught us, <u>but</u> finally we arrived in Keszthely!*
> *We had a long bath in Borgáta's thermal water, and <u>after</u> a refreshing shower we had a delicious lunch at a restaurant.*

The last type of cohesive technique used in the script is lexical cohesion. Throughout the script the candidate maintains unity with the creation and repetition of lexical chains that contain key words describing actions characteristic of trips. Paragraph 2 contains the chain *left – went to – spent – left*; Paragraph 3 introduces the phrasal verb *arrive in* repeated in the lexical chain in Paragraph 4 *(left – went to – left – arrived in),* which echoes the words from the lexical chain in Paragraph 2. The repetition of these verbs creates and maintains the impression of movement.

As the analysis presented above shows, even a lower level candidate can produce a coherent script. To achieve this, it is important even in a simple script that the ideas are organised logically, that the relationship between them is realised with the use of cohesive techniques, and that there are no punctuation errors that disrupt communication.

Sample lower level scripts

The following five scripts were written by candidates for the lower level examination on the sample task presented above. Read the scripts and study the

marks and justifications given for each script for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion. When you read the scripts and their evaluations, you should refer to the Coherence and Cohesion scale (Figure 9.1), the Guidelines for rating Coherence and Cohesion (Figure 9.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion (Table 9.2), and the task-specific rating scheme.

Script 01

Dear Chris,

I'm writing you again. I spent two weeks in Keszthely, at lake Balaton. I was there with my family. It was good, very very good, and it was not boring!
We had a day trip on Sunday. We got up at 7 o'clock, and after a quick breakfast we left Keszthely at 8. a.m. We went to Sümeg and spent there one and a half hour. The castle was old and beautiful. We drunk a coffee there and after it we left the castle.
We arrived to Borgáta at about 12 o'clock. We had a long bath in Borgáta's thermal water, and after a freshing shower we had a delicious lunch at a restaurant. There was many people who wanted to eat, so the waiter was very busy!
We left Borgáta at 3 o'clock and we went to the Kis-Balaton, where we could see many coloured bird at the lake, and I took many photoes, I'll show them next time!
We went back Keszthely after the birdwatching. We were tired and a summer rain caught us. But finally we arrived there, to Keszthely!
 See you soon
 x

(186 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: 7

Justification: The text is fully cohesive on sentence- and paragraph-level, following the chronological order of the content points. Some explicit cohesive markers are used well *(I was there, and after it, so the waiter was, where we could see, show them, finally)*. No paragraph indentation appears but the organisation of thoughts is clear.

Script 02

Dear Chris,

Now I'm writing from Keszthely. I'm spending here my holiday with my family. Keszthely is at Lake Balaton, as you know.

Yesterday I took a day trip in the countryside. We started from the hotel at 8 o'clock by car. We travelled to Sümeg and we were in the castle 1,5 hours long.

We had lunch in Borgáta. There's a thermal bath, which is fantastic, and there were many people. But we couldn't spent there as much time as we want, because wanted to watch Kis-Balaton and the beautiful birds. We have taken many photos. At 9 o'clock we had to travel back to Keszthely because it began to rain. The family was tired, but happy.

I hope you'll write me soon. Yours:

(123 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: **6**

Justification: Good use of linking devices *(and; but; because, which)* and logical sequencing of topics resulting in a unified letter. Previously mentioned elements nicely referred to *(here, the hotel, there)*. The visual marking of paragraphs is not logical.

Script 03

Dear Chris,

In my last holiday I was in Keszthely. Keszthely is a very beautiful country.
The first day at 8 a.m. we went to Sümeg. We were in the castle about 1.5 hours. That was very interesting. Than we went to Borgáta in a thermalbath. We had lunch, and known many peoples there. Than we were birdwatching and took some photos.
In later time we travelled to back. The travelling was very boring. The weather was bad because it was raining.
I'm was very tired because, I must get up early and than we travelled all day.
But apart from the travelling it was a very good trip, I think.
I hope you'll write soon!
Best wishes

(116 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: | 4 |

Justification: Some use of linking devices *(and, because, apart from),* otherwise simple sentences. Organisation on text-level is achieved with the use of some time expressions *(first...; then?; ...later...)* and adequate sequencing of topics. Paragraph breaks are not logical and consistent.

Script 04

Dear Chris,

I'm writing my letter from Lake Balaton. I'm staying here for a week. It's a beautiful countryside! We are in Keszthely. Imagine, the second day we have done a tripe. It was quite interesting. We've woken up at 7 o'clock. I was sleepy but my mother has given me a couple of coffee. We have gone at 8 o'clock to the castle of Sümeg. It was beautiful. We were there 1,5 hours, but I think, it wasn't enough. I've bought a little castle for you because I would like, if you see it. It was half eleven, and we have gone to Borgáta. The road was boring, and in the car was a terrible warm. We have arrived at 12 o'clock. In Borgáta there is a termal bath and to many people. The sun shone so we have gone to the bath. There we have eaten our lunch.

(148 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: 3

Justification: The writer has followed the order set by the list of content points and used a selection of linking devices appropriately *(here, there; because; but, and, so)*; nevertheless, the letter reads like a list, the chronological order of the events is not made clear with the use of time expressions. The text is written in one block.

Script 05

Dear Chris,

I had a good holiday last year. We spent two month at Lake Balaton. We took a day trip in the countryside. I think, I write a short letter, what happened. We repaired the equipment and we start the trip at 8a.m. I was very tired. The first station was the castle of Sümeg. This trip was 1.5 hours. We saw the castle, than we go to Borgáta. We go to the thermalbath. We spent a lot of time there. Than we go to the restaurant and we eat a lunch. The lunch was very bad. In the city were many people. The people was very friendly. Than, we go into the car. We go to Kis-Balaton. We made a lot of photos. We watch a lot of bird. Than, we go to Keszthely. The weather was very bad. I'm very tired!

(142 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: 3

Justification: The letter is written in one paragraph, with some traces of sentence-level cohesion, but little paragraph-level coherence and cohesion. The writing situation is not clear in the introduction (If the holiday was last year, why would the candidate write about it now?), and the rest of the sentences do not form a unified whole either. Very short, not always connected sentences.
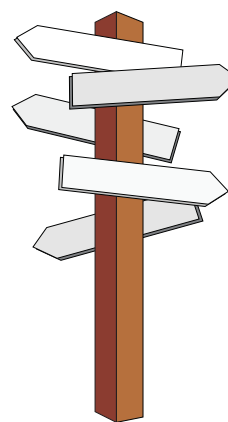
Lower level Coherence and Cohesion rating practice

The previous section introduced a sample task and presented the Coherence and Cohesion scores and their justifications for a number of scripts. In this section another lower level task is introduced together with sample performances. Using the Coherence and Cohesion scale (Figure 9.1), the Guidelines for rating Coherence and Cohesion (Figure 9.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion (Table 9.2), and the task-specific rating scheme provided below, mark the scripts for Coherence and Cohesion. Make sure you take notes of the reasons why you award or subtract points. Having concluded the rating of the scripts, refer to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

Lower level practice task

Your school has an English language student magazine and you want to write an **article** for it about what makes a good class trip. Look at the notes below and write about the different possibilities. Give reasons why you think one is better than the other.

• How to travel? (Train? Hire a bus?)
• Where to stay? (Camp site? Hotel?)
• What to eat? (Fast-food? Food taken from home?)
• Where to go? (Mountains? Towns?)

Write an article of about **180 words** in an appropriate style. Use the title *Tips for a good class trip*.

The task-specific rating scheme for the lower level practice task

Content points for raters

• introducing the problem (what makes a good class trip)
• means of transportation (train vs. bus)
• accommodation (camp-site vs. hotel)
• eating (fast food vs. food from home)
• destination (mountains vs. town)
• rounding off (the article must not end abruptly)

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an **article** in about **180 words**
- cover content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- express their opinion and support their choices
- use comparative structures, (modal) auxiliaries
- use appropriate style for genre and target audience (fellow students)
- use language to express likes / dislikes, argue for and against options

Note: The genre (article for student magazine) allows the use of colloquial expressions and contracted forms in order to achieve the desired effect on the target reader.

Lower level practice task scripts

Script 01

Tips for a good class trip

Would you like to travel with your class but you don't know what possibilities would be better for you? Here are some good tips for a good class trip!

Decide, if you want a cheap trip or an interested trip! If you want a cheap one you should go by train but you chose other you can go anywhere by bus.
Where to stay? Partly it depends on your comfortable-feeling because you don't like being in camp-site it is worth being in a hotel. Sure, you can pay it.

The eating is very hard because everybody likes other food like you. It is worth taking food from home and look for a cheap and good "restaurant"!
Sure you won't agree where to go mountain or town? Do you like climbing? No? Then let you go to town! Do you like going out at night? you can just do it in a town. At least you can go out together in a mountain.

(162 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion:

Justification:

Script 02

Tips for a good class trip

What makes a good class trip? – that's a good question.

First of all the class should choose the best way to travel. The most common options are usually the train or the bus. Both has advantages but usually travelling by train is much cheaper but less mobile. So if a class wants to make some short excursions from a base point I would deffinetly choose the bus. Than the other problem is the accomodation.

I think the best option for that problem is somwhere half way between the camp-sites and hotels. It's called youth hostels. They are built for youths. And altough they are very well equipped they aren't expensive.

The problem of food is the third. It's a hard question. If we want a cheaper trip, I would prefer food taken from home. But than we have to spare time for making it. Fast-food is the other alternative. It's more expensive, but one has fewer problems with it. We can also try canteen if there is any in the youth hostel or somwhere nearby.

And finally we have to decide where to go. In the towns there are lot of free time fascilities, while in the mountains you can make some nice trips. I think the best option would be a town in the mountains.

(216 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: ☐

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 03

Tips for a good class trip

The first problem is that how to get to that place. I think to hire a bus is better than travel by train. In the bus we are together, but on the train the class is devided to different parts of the train. The negative thing is that the bus may be more expensive than the train. But if you have a hired bus, you can go everytime, everywhere. The cheap-expensive question is due to the next question: if you go to a camp-site, it will be cheaper. Of course the hotel is much more comfortable. I think it depends on the situation. On a class trip you can eat in a restaurant or the food taken from home. I think both of them available on a trip. For breakfast it is good to eat cold meal, which has taken from home, but for dinner is better to eat in a restaurant. And finally, as for the 'where to go question', I think it is better to go to the mountains. In the mountains you are alone in the nature. There is fresh air, marvellus landsight and space, silence. But this is my personal oppinion, of course the human culture is in the towns, which is important too.

(208 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion:

Justification:

Script 04

Tips for a good class trip

I think the good class tripps base is the group. On the good trips is one group and not a two or three or many groups. Firs you can find a place where you can go and you can feel good yourself. I now that not easy because each of people want to go otherwere were the us can. Because they are can find a place when every body can and want to go then can find programs and exercise to do on it. That good if the trip are 3 or 4 day longest. The best of the travel is the train because it's interesting and slow. On the trains people are talk and jok and do good group things. For the class trips are the most popular is a camp-site and a colige, because in there doing it some interesting thing. On the first day the people are eat food from home and the next days are eat fast-food or eat in a restaurant.

(166 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: ☐

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 05

Tips for a good class trip

I would like to give some pieces of information how to make a good class trip. So first you will have to look for an adult who is reliable and who is able to responsible for you. The second task is you have to decide where you will go. For example I think it is worth going to a town. Then you have to reserve a youth hostel or a camp. If you sleep in a camp you can make your foods or you can take food from home. After that you should hire a bus or you can take a walk to the destination. If you took a walk, this would be healthy but if you choose the first one you will be sure that the journey will be comfortable and fast. If you are ready with these you have to talk about the programes. I think in the morning you can visit museums and other things which is famous, after that in the evening you can go to the town and look for some entertainment place where you can enjoy yourself.

Have a good journey.

(183 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion:

Justification:

KEY: Justifications and scores for Coherence and Cohesion

Script 01
The indentation of the paragraphs is not consistent, but the ideas are separated into logical units. The use of a question *(Where to stay?)* provides smooth transition from one content point to the other. The clauses are linked with conjunctions *(but; if; or),* but linking word *if* occasionally missing *(because you don't like being in camp-site it is worth being in a hotel. Sure, you can pay it.)*. There should be no comma after *decide.* **Score: 5**

Script 02
The text is divided into paragraphs, but the divisions are not always logical. The sentence beginning *First of all* should form one unit with the paragraph following it. The last sentence of this paragraph belongs to the subsequent one on accommodation. The logic of the text is marked clearly with the effective use of markers that guide the reader from problem to problem *(First of all, the other problem, … the third, And finally)*. **Score: 6**

Script 03
The article is written in one block in spite of the fact that the content points are developed enough to be separated in paragraphs. Good sentence-level cohesion. Some cohesive markers; all applied well: *The first problem, And finally*. Comma missing after *Of course.* **Score: 5**

Script 04
One block paragraph in which the subsections are not clear. Some attempt at organising the ideas *(Firs),* but the text does not read well. Adequate range of linking elements *(where, or, and, because, if, first)* and some unsuccessful attempts *(when, then)* at connecting ideas, but the ideas themselves are very difficult to follow. **Score: 2**

Script 05
The text is written in one block. The writer states the reason for writing in the first sentence and follows it up with sentences organised in time sequence *(For example, Then, After that)*. Parts of sentences are linked *(and, but, after that)*. Punctuation is inconsistent (comma missing in *If you sleep in a camp you can make your foods or you can take food from home* but given in *If you took a walk, this would be healthy but if you choose the first one you will be sure that the journey will be comfortable and fast.*) **Score: 5**

The Hungarian Model Examination: Higher level

The previous section illustrated the marking of lower level scripts for Coherence and Cohesion and presented sample scripts for practice. The following section illustrates and provides practice in marking higher level scripts. Use the information given in the Coherence and Cohesion scale (Figure 9.1), the Guidelines for rating Coherence and Cohesion (Figure 9.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion (Table 9.2), and the task-specific rating scheme provided with the task to mark the scripts.

Sample higher level task

The following is a higher level writing task that instructs candidates to write an article for an international magazine for students. The candidates can follow the organisational pattern suggested by the task, but if it suits their purposes they can also change the order in which they discuss the bullet points.

The following text appeared in an internet magazine for students.

Physical Education
by Mary – Brecksville, Ohio, US

Everyone says they wish they had more time in the day. I know how they feel when I have to stay up late to finish homework. If I didn't have to take P.E. classes, I would have more time for everything.

What is your opinion? Write a letter to Mary. In your letter write about

• your opinion about Mary's idea
• why some Hungarian students like PE
• why you like or dislike it
• what young people could do to have more time

Write about 200 words below. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Mary,

_____

_____

_____

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample higher level task

---

Content points for raters

- introduction (where the candidate read about Mary's idea)
- giving opinion about Mary's idea
- explaining why some Hungarian students like PE
- explaining why the candidate likes or dislikes PE
- giving advice on what young people could do to have more time
- closing formula

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an *informal letter* in about *200* words
- cover content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- express opinion and support arguments (CP2, CP4)
- give information (CP3)
- give advice (CP5)
- use appropriate style (informal and chatty)

CP = content point

Sample higher level scripts

Script 01

Dear Mary,

I understand your problem about not having enough time for all the activities you want to do. Many people (not only students but adults) share your problem but the solving of this is not to stop taking P. E. classes. Taking them is as important as doing your homework because without doing any exercises you can't use your brain enough. I mean, it's unhealthy to do white-collar jobs only.

In Hungary P. E. classes are much liked and almost everyone can find the kind of sport which is ideal for him or her. During playing football or basketball they can learn how to communicate with each other and their physical condition is also developing.

I like P. E. lessons because I've many tiring and sometimes maybe unnecessary lessons and doing some sport between them can be very relaxing. It's beyond me how students can say that they hate P. E. classes. I tried to explain them that people can't only sit on their chair and learn in the whole day and then continue it with the homework at home.

If you feel that you haven't got enough time for your life, try to recheck your everyday activities and spend less time for the less important things. And try to sleep less but sleep well at the same time.

I'm waiting for your answer.

Best wishes
Robert

(225 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion   6

Justification: Logical text with coherent paragraphs. Some disrupting pronoun reference problems: *they* (Who?), *it* (What?). Inconsistent use of pronouns to refer to people generally: *him or her, they/their.* Otherwise very good sentence-level cohesion with effective use of linking devices. The paragraphs are not marked clearly.

Script 02

Dear Mary,

I know what you mean but I think that you should only cause the educational system. The government doesn't care about students they want us to know many things that can be found in lexical books, and teachers give a lot of homework that can't be done in one day if you even liked to sleep, eat and have some free time.

    Most Hungarian students like P. E. because the like to move a bit and do some exercises. Some other boys and I think that we could have more P. E. lessons. In tat case our brain would work better. I like P. E. because I like to sport, it improves your reflexes your body becomes healthier and stronger. At the same time learning makes you smarter but weaker. Not just your body will be weaker but even your immune system so you will be an ideal place for viruses.

    I think that young people can do nothing to have more time. The government or the educational system should do something to solve the problem.

(176 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion | 5 |

Justification: The text is divided into logical paragraphs. All the paragraphs are coherent. Good sentence-level cohesion *(and, because)*. Effective use of linking device: *in that case*. Incorrect linking device: *at the same time*. The first paragraph does not read well. The mix of personal pronouns that refer to the same person is disturbing: <u>*I*</u> *like P. E. because* <u>*I*</u> *like to sport, it improves* <u>*your*</u> *reflexes* <u>*your*</u> *body becomes healthier and stronger.* Punctuation mistakes: a few missing commas (e.g. *The government doesn't care about students ... they want us to know many things that can be found in lexical books*) that do not disrupt meaning.

Script 03

Dear Mary,

Our opinion isn't the same in this. Because at first I have to say, I like P. E. very much. I think students (boys) like P. E. very, very much. This is a kind a relax, in hard days. Your mind can relax while you're sporting. Another thing: if your body is healthy, your mentional ability better. I don't know what kind of Physical Education have you in USA, but in Hungarian these lessons are the most funniest, and the happiest part of the day (in my school). Probably I don't know what is a really P. E. class, because we are always playing in it. We're playing basketball, floor ball, and football every class. We don't have to do floor exercises, and don't have to run round and round in gym. This is why Hungarian students like P. E. classes. I have another argument. I have a very funny and attractive teacher. So, if you want to have more time you shouldn't leave out P. E. you shouldn't watch so much TV. Take my advice and you will see that there are other ways instead of not being P.E. lessons.

(191 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion   4

Justification: The text should be divided into three paragraphs (the effects of sport, PE in Hungary, recommendation). Some incorrectly used commas. Sentence-level cohesion good. Paragraphs are not marked and most of the piece lacks coherence, but there is some flow of linked ideas.

Script 04

Dear Mary,

Thank you for your letter I'm glad to hear that you are keeping well. Yesterday I read your text about PE, and I was shocked at that thing. I think it is a very stupid thing. I can't agree with you at that point, because students should do exercises everyday. It is good for your health and it refresh your body. I like PE very much more than other lessons in my school, because my PE teacher is a very good teacher and he is my basketball coach. So we are in a very good friendship. But sometimes we do very hard exercises, those aren't very good so I don't like them. In Hungarian I think many students like PE, because this is the only lesson in which they don't have to learn, and make homework. They can getting away from other lessons at least for an hour. Those students who don't have enough time to learn, should not go for PE or go for entertainments. The most important thing they should watch TV, because they don't learn from it and it is very bad. So take my advice and write an other text about this. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

   Best wishes!
   Zoli

(205 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion | 3 |

Justification: There are no paragraphs. The text is not coherent: it must be read several times to understand it. The ideas do not follow logically. The last part *(Those students who …)* is contradictory and difficult to follow. Sentence-level cohesion is better with the use of linking devices (e.g.: *and; because*), although some sentences are unclear (e.g. *that* references in the first few sentences).

Script 05

Dear Mary,

I can't agree the principle you've drafted, because it's not the quantity of free time that counts but the proper disposal of it. Physica education in schools is vital, because the care of the students' physical condition's determines their future life-quality. The effects of intellectual-loading, which students face every day can be very effectively recovered from in the way of physical education.

   The most of the students like PE, because they have an inner instinct to make sports. One's general state of health and general feeling will surely be much beetter before a healthy motion or physical work. I personally feel also much bette before PE lesons.

   The students, who suffer from the insufficient time have to plan their daily schedule better, or have to reduce their other programs, because the omission of bodily-care can take irreversible effects in our lives. You, like every other students of your age, also need PE lessons in order to have a healthy life, you'd better reduce your intellectual loadings.

Best wishes: Peter

(168 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion | 3 |

Justification: The first two paragraphs lack coherence: they cannot be followed and are not connected. Recurring comma mistake: *, because*. This is less disruptive than the wrong use of commas in the relative clause *(The students, who suffer from the insufficient time have)*. The text does not read well. There are some complex sentences in which sentence-level cohesion is good *(but, so)*.

Higher level Coherence and Cohesion rating practice

The previous section provided practice in rating higher level scripts for Coherence and Cohesion. In this section another higher level task is introduced together with sample performances and your task is to mark the scripts for Coherence and Cohesion and give justifications for your marks.

Higher level practice task

Use the Coherence and Cohesion scale (Figure 9.1), the Guidelines for rating Coherence and Cohesion (Figure 9.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Coherence and Cohesion criterion (Table 9.2), and the task-specific rating scheme provided with the task to mark the scripts for Coherence and Cohesion. Make a note about the reasons why you award or subtract points. Having rated the scripts, go to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

> You have heard that the local government is planning to build a new shopping mall with a large parking lot right next to your school, at the place where there is a large sports ground now. Your school has an English-language student magazine. You have decided to write for it an **article** with the heading "*Shopping mall or sports ground?*" in which you give your opinion about this plan.
>
> In your article consider the following:
>
> • Which one is needed more?
> • Benefits for the local people
> • Drawbacks for the local people
> • Effect on the environment
>
> Write your article in about **200-250 words**.

The task-specific rating scheme for the higher level practice task

Content points for raters

• introducing the problem
• choosing the alternative needed more
• explaining its benefits for local people
• explaining its drawbacks for local people
• describing future effects on the environment
• conclusion

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an **article** of approximately **200-250** words
- cover content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- express opinion and support arguments
- use appropriate language (modal auxiliaries, comparatives, conditionals)
- use appropriate style for genre and audience (fellow students)

Note: the genre (article for student magazine) allows the use of colloquial expressions and contracted forms in order to achieve the desired effect on the target reader.

Higher level practice task scripts

Script 01

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I'm sure, you've heard about the government's new idea. If you haven't, I tell you that they want to build a shopping mall, where there's the sports ground now. I don't know what do you think about this, but when I heard it, I was amazingly shocked. Maybe you know, I mad about sports. I especially like football, basketball, volleyball. Every day after school, I do these relaxing activities, till now.

   I don't know what the people say in the neighbourhood about this, but I think, they wouldn't agree.
There are parents, who has children, and they know, how important doing sports.
I know there are advantages for a huge shopping center. It makes lives much more comfortable. They wouldn't have to go to the greengrocer, to the butcher, and etc. every day, they can buy everything at the same place, and probably on lower price than now, but think about it, how would it effects the environment. Yes, you should think about this view, too.
Building an enormous shopping mall like this is always a hard work.
It would bring a lot of noise, dirt and dust, and it would take a lot of money at all.
My view seems to be a little bit selfish, because I like much more doing sports, than do the shopping.
But this is my own opinion, others can have different view.

(229 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: ☐

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 02

Shopping mall or sports ground?

Well I think that it has both advantages and disadvantages. The first advantage is that there are a lot of flats near the school so it would be easier to these people to get things like food, clothes, toys for children and so ....
But on the other hand, it would be a temptation for students and a reason for not to go to school. They would go to the cinema instead of going to the lesions. And the other thing is that we need the sports ground for P.E. lessons and some of us likes to play football and basketball there at the weekends. And we need sports to keep ourselves fit. It's better than spending our money on clothes that we wear just because everybody wears it or a ticket to the cinema.
And the last thing I want to tell you its effect on the environment. We shouldn't cut out the forest just because we want a shopping mal. They manufacture the oxigen that we breath in. And it's a nice place for spending your free time or you can take your dog there for a walk. This forest has a special atmosphere that you should enjoy. We don't need this shopping mal at the edge of the city.

(212 words)

 Score for Coherence and Cohesion:

Justification:

Script 03

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I think all of us has heard about that our favourite sports ground position is disputed. A new shopping mall is planning to build.

It's difficult to ask the question which is needed more. In my opinion there are to much shopping mall these days. On the other hand there are just a few place where you can spend your free time well. On my view children need fresh air and lots of moving. It's good for health especially after a long and hard day at school. During playing football, basketball it's easy to find some good friend.

You can spend your time in a shopping mal too. You can see a movie or eat in McDonalds after school, and you don't have to travel so much to do the shopping. There are some disadvantages about the traffic. If a new shopping mall build here it will be more dangerous to be on the road. My opinion is that will be really bad for the environment. Just think about the pollution, litter.

All in all I think it's not important to build a new shopping mall.

(186 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion:

Justification:

Script 04

Shopping mall or sports ground?

In my opinion a sports ground is more important than a shopping mall.

First of all in most of the cities the number of free areas where people can go is becoming less and less. I think it is very bad, because in cities people don't have as many possibilities to get fresh air than they have in the countryside. People living in cities can only go to parks, or sports grounds if they don't want to travel a lot. Moreover sports grounds are useful for children and adults too, because a father can play football, basketball, etc. with his son or daughter so they can spend their free time in fresh air and also they are together.

Furthermore it is good for living a healthy life, since if there's a sports ground around where you live, it is more likely that you go there play rather than watch TV or listen to music, which means that you do not move.

However there are bad points too.

Firstly, installing a new shopping mall would mean new job possibilities. Secondly, people living there would be able to do the shopping in one place and may be in shorter time. There would more place of entertainment, such as cinemas, restaurants and pubs.

At last people would have a bigger choice of goods, which would probably make them feel better. All in all I think the sports ground would be better for the people and the environment too, and it might make people live a more healthier life.

(255 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: ☐

Justification: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Script 05

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I am fully aware that we are supposed to be a *consumer society,* and I support that. Honest. But when we start to consume things that are a fair bit more important than material belongings, then maybe it's time to stand up and say "back off"! What I'm talking about, of course, is the government's plan to build a shopping mall – parking lot combo where the sports ground is.

Now don't get me wrong I understand the many valid reasons for it. After all, it would make shopping *so* much easier for the locals who have to travel fifteen whole minutes to get to the nearest mall and spend unreasonable amounts of their hard-earned money. Building yet another one here (besides the at least ten other ones scattered around the city) would also make it possible for the more fitness-conscious to jog to the shops, which would indeed fully compensate the loss of the football field that undeservingly occupies so much potential commercial area. Doesn't it?

As you read through this article you are probably thinking "Oh, great, he'll surely go on babbling about the environmental effects and everything." Well, you're wrong. I'm not going to rant about the increased traffic, noise damage, construction waste, and I'm definitely not going to even mention the effect of the mall on the students' mentality.

See here, I'm not judging the authorities or anything. I just feel the urge to voice my opinion and stand up for our rights to our health and pace of life.

(253 words)

Score for Coherence and Cohesion: ☐

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

KEY: Justifications and scores for Coherence and Cohesion

Script 01
The writer has followed the order provided by the list of content points and used some linking devices appropriately; however, the general effect is rather episodic. Examples of linking devices used are *if, but, and, because.* Previously mentioned elements are nicely referred to (e.g. *If you haven't, I tell you that they want to build a shopping mall, where there's the sports ground now.*) The indication of paragraphs is not clear and towards the end the piece becomes fragmented and falls apart. **Score: 3**

Script 02
The text is not divided into logical paragraphs. Other linking devices are also used, but the text is not coherent. Strange combination of transition words: *first, on the other hand, and the other thing is, and the last thing.* Relationship between sports-money-clothes in *And we need sports to keep ourselves fit. It's better than spending our money on clothes that we wear just because everybody wears it or a ticket to the cinema* is not clear. The overuse of *and* to link sentences is disturbing. **Score: 4**

Script 03
Sentence-level cohesion is acceptable. There are no logical paragraphs and the candidate uses commas instead of co-ordinating conjunctions (e.g. *football, basketball, pollution, litter*), which is disturbing. A few good transition words: *on the other hand, all in all.* The text is fragmented. **Score: 3**

Script 04
The text is not divided into clear paragraphs. One-sentence paragraphs used. The text is cohesive on sentence level, but the overall coherence is broken with the sentence *However there are bad points too,* which makes the reader expect disadvantages and yet reads about job opportunities, less time spent shopping, more entertainment, etc. Some good markers are used to organise the text: *in my opinion; first of all; moreover; and also; furthermore; which means; firstly; secondly; however; all in all.* Several commas are missing. **Score: 5**

Script 05
The text shows good and varied sentence- and paragraph-level cohesion. The linking devices have been used to good effect. The text is fully coherent, the candidate's ideas are presented in clearly organised and indented paragraphs. **Score: 7**

Implications for teaching

Coherence and Cohesion describe features of texts that are difficult both to assess and to teach. This chapter has summarised the features of coherence and cohesion and provided practice for raters. In this final section of the chapter we discuss

what language teachers can do to help their students understand coherence and cohesion and write well-organised texts.

When teaching coherence, it is important that students understand first that effectively written texts are logical. They must understand that the ideas developed in a text follow in a particular order determined by the discourse mode of the text or the purpose of the writer. At lower levels it is the discourse mode that is more important to teach. Low-level language course books give learners narrative and descriptive texts in the form of reading and writing materials suitable for teaching elementary grammar (e.g. present tense description of a family, past tense forms of verbs in a narration). Learners have to read and write simple comparison and contrast texts when they learn about the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. By reading and writing texts with different rhetorical modes, language learners organise information according to the principles that underlie these modes. (These principles are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and are referred to in the chapters presenting various text types, especially in Chapter 6.) Therefore, teachers should make learners aware of these organising principles during classroom reading and writing activities.

The organising principle that shapes a text can be elicited with questions that learners answer about the text. For instance, they can be asked to summarise a narrative by answering questions like *What happens at the beginning/in the middle/at the end of the story?* The organising principle of a description can be revealed, for example, with questions like *What does the writer describe first/next/finally?* The logic according to which ideas are organised in a text can be noticed more easily if two short texts based on two different organising principles are examined together.

When students have learnt to identify texts by type, they can practise the vocabulary and grammar typical of the text types (e.g. time phrases for narration, correlative conjunctions like *not only/but also, either/or* for comparison and contrast). Since most general language course books give little if any help for the language teacher in this respect, teachers may find it useful to consult course books intended for writing skills development or may want to select from a course book three or four examples of the same text type, study them carefully, and write a list of the features (grammar, lexis) that are common to all of them.

Learners with higher language proficiency can be expected to read and produce more complex texts that combine several rhetorical patterns. In such texts ideas are likely to be organised primarily not according to a particular pattern but according to the writer's purpose. For example, if the writer's purpose is to explain something, information familiar to the reader will precede unknown information that is more difficult to understand.

Teachers who want their students to understand the organisation of such texts can ask their students to write the outline of the text. Students should identify the main idea formulated in each paragraph and indicate the function of each paragraph. In the outline it is easier to see what the writer says in each paragraph, the reason why something is said, and how the ideas are arranged one after the other.

In preparation for a language examination, teachers may analyse writing tasks

together with their students. Except for tasks with short, one-sentence prompts (See Chapter 3 for a detailed description of task types), writing tasks often define one possible order in which the content points that must be included in the script can be discussed. For example, the order in which the content points are given in bullet point format may indicate a logical order in which the ideas can be addressed in the script (e.g. the class trip task on page 193 in this chapter). The picture input in the letter task given on page 184 in this chapter also prompts the order of the ideas in the script: departure → arrival.

When students have understood that a text becomes logical because the ideas in it are logically related to one another, they can start using connectors (transition words and phrases, co-ordinating conjunctions, subordinators). Textbooks usually display such words in tables and provide gap-filling exercises for practice. Unfortunately, in most cases such exercises contain decontextualised sentences that teach very little about connectors. Learners are usually left with only the impression that such words must be used but fail to use them correctly or they overuse them.

To avoid this, learners must first be taught the meaning of connectors. If they know what the words mean, they will be more likely to use them according to their function. The grammatical role of these words should be taught next. Co-ordinating conjunctions, for instance, are most frequently used to connect words, phrases and clauses. Their use at the beginning of sentences is therefore not frequent in written English.

Different connectors require the use of different punctuation rules. For instance, the co-ordinating conjunction *but* is preceded by a comma if it links two clauses, yet the co-ordinating adverbial *however* is preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma when it connects two clauses. Students must therefore be taught how to punctuate correctly sentences that contain co-ordinators.

However, besides those that apply to co-ordinators, there are a large number of punctuation rules and teachers may wonder which of them they should teach. They should pay special attention to those punctuation errors that result in mis-understanding and that are caused by the interference of Hungarian punctuation rules. An example of a punctuation error that leads to misunderstanding is the incorrect use of commas in relative clauses, for example, the use of a comma before *that (She said, that the book had been stolen)*.

The scrambled text is an exercise suitable for practising the construction of coherent and unified texts. In such exercises students have to reorder sentences (if the text is short) or paragraphs (if the text is long) by focusing on meaning and the use of connectors. They have to guess the logic of the text and often exclude sentences that are irrelevant and do not develop the main idea of the text.

At lower levels, where language learners produce one-paragraph scripts, the concept of a developed paragraph is not yet relevant. However, unity is a key concept even at this level. Learners often digress, start discussing ideas not related to the topic, and do not realise it. Teachers must stress that whenever students write a text, they should read it when they have finished writing. Ideally students should write an outline before they start writing, but language learners rarely do

this. If they do not have an outline to guide them and to prevent them from digressing, they should read their completed scripts carefully.

A technique that can be taught to higher proficiency learners who produce complex compositions is the thesis statement and the topic sentence test. Writers can check if their texts are unified if they transform the thesis statement, the main idea of a composition, into a question and check whether the ideas included in the script answer this question. Similarly, if they want to check whether a paragraph is unified, they should transform the topic sentence into a question and check whether each idea in the paragraph answers it directly or indirectly.

Teachers should also give explicit training in the use of cohesive devices. This can be done together with grammar exercises. Sentence combination exercises are suitable for teaching reference and conjunction. Exercises in which learners have to delete items from complex sentences but keep them grammatical can be used for teaching ellipsis. Substitution is usually taught and practised in course books together with conversations. Finally, lexical chains can be explored, for example, with the keyword hunt exercise. In this exercise learners must identify those words that are directly (repetition) or indirectly (synonym, antonym) related to the main topic of the text.

When teaching coherence and cohesion, teachers should tailor the features taught to the complexity of the texts their students can produce. Furthermore, they should approach both coherence and cohesion functionally. If students understand what the function of these features of texts are, they may be able to translate their knowledge into practice and write texts that are logical and flow smoothly. Besides teaching coherence and cohesion explicitly, teachers should have their students regularly read many texts of various types. Reading a lot and paying attention not only to the message of the text but also to how the text is constructed to express that message can develop students' sense of coherence and cohesion.

In this chapter the discussion of cohesion often made it necessary to mention such aspects of language that most language books treat as grammar. Raters and teachers must therefore make a distinction between those grammatical features of scripts that will be marked under the Coherence and Cohesion criterion and those that belong to the Accuracy criterion, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

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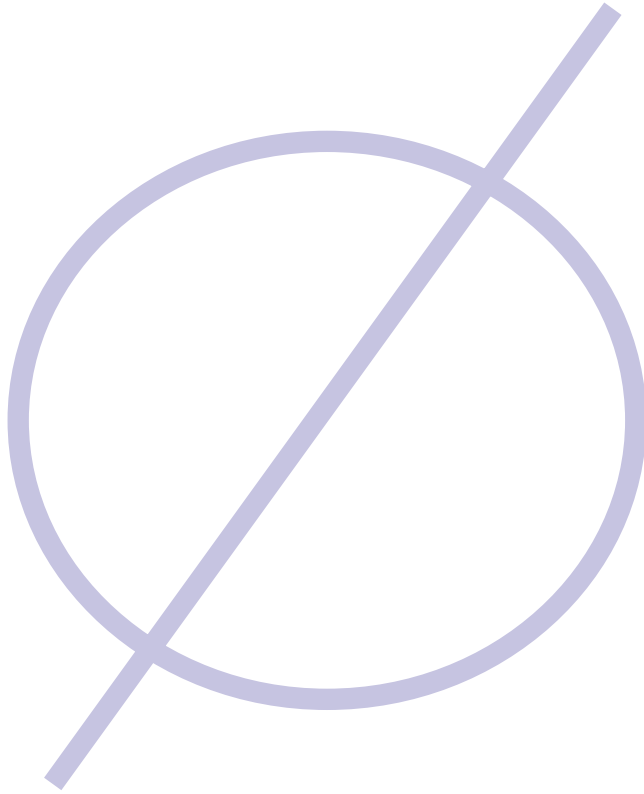
Chapter 10
Grammar

General description of the Grammar criterion

The Grammar criterion in an analytic rating scale makes possible the assessment of candidates' grammatical knowledge. Raters evaluate grammatical knowledge by checking whether candidates are familiar with the form, meaning and use of a range of grammatical structures that can be expected to occur in a communication situation.

Knowing a grammatical structure means that candidates are familiar with its form (e.g. the second person imperative has the same form as the bare infinitive *Hurry up!*) and can apply the rules that govern its construction. It means furthermore that they know what meaning a grammatical structure expresses (e.g. the imperative is used to give a command), when and why it is used (e.g. to make a person perform a specific action), and how it must be used in different situations in order to communicate an intended meaning appropriately (e.g. *Give me an apple* is less polite than *Could I have a glass of water*). Candidates must also know how different structures can be combined during the process of composition to create grammatically acceptable sentences (e.g. such typical patternings of words as *verb + to infinitive* and *verb + noun + to infinitive* as in *I hope to see her soon* or *He never asks anyone to water his plants while he is away on holiday*).

Knowing does not necessarily mean that the candidate is able to recite the rules. It is not the explicit knowledge of the rules but the ability to use them which shows that a candidate has implicit knowledge of the rules. *Knowing,* therefore, should be interpreted as "the candidate can use X to mean Y."

Measures of grammar quality

The grammar used in a script is often assessed in a general language proficiency examination on the basis of **range**, **degree of mastery**, and **accuracy**. It is important therefore for raters to be familiar with what these features refer to because they may be expected to base their decisions on them when they give a score for grammar.

Range

Range refers to the variety of different grammatical structures used within a script: tenses, modals, passive constructions, etc. A script with a large variety of grammatical structures is likely to be awarded a better score for grammar than a script that contains a few grammatical structures used repetitively. However, raters should not expect candidates to display all their grammar knowledge in a script. While some tasks require that candidates employ a variety of tenses, other tasks necessitate the use of modal auxiliaries or conditional sentences, so raters must

adjust their expectations to the particular writing task that was used to elicit the scripts they are assessing. If the types of grammatical structures that can be expected to be found in a script are not described in detail in a rating scheme accompanying the writing task, raters should write their own script in order to see what kind of grammatical knowledge that particular task draws on.

What can be expected from candidates in terms of the range of grammatical structures depends not only on the writing task but also on the time and number of words set for the completion of the task. More time allows for more careful planning and redrafting, which can result in a more thoughtfully constructed text and perhaps in the inclusion in the script of a larger variety of grammatical structures. The length specified for the script can also affect the variety of structures: a longer script containing developed paragraphs can be expected to display a larger variety of structures.

Consequently, raters must always interpret range by taking into consideration the topic and subtopics that must be developed in a writing task, the time allotted for the completion of the script, and the number of words set.

Degree of mastery

Degree of mastery refers to how familiar candidates are with the different meanings and functions of a grammatical structure, and whether they can use it appropriately in a particular communication situation. Candidates with varying levels of grammatical knowledge may have a different grasp of the same grammatical structure. For instance, a lower level candidate may know that the present continuous tense is formed with the present tense of the auxiliary verb *be* followed by the present participle, and that it is used to express an action that is happening at the moment of speaking *(I am reading now)*. A more proficient candidate may also be able to use the same tense form to express an action happening about the time of speaking but not necessarily at the moment of speaking *(I am reading a novel by Hemingway)*. Furthermore, a candidate who has an even better control of this tense may know that it can also express definite plans for the future *(I am meeting Pat tonight)*, or annoyance *(He is always losing our house keys)*. More proficient language learners can use one specific form to express different meanings.

Degree of mastery also refers to the candidates' ability to vary the form of a grammatical structure in order to express the same meaning. For instance, a candidate who can use not only the basic form of the type one conditional sentence *(If you travel by train you will get to know your new classmates by the end of the long journey),* but can articulate the same idea in various forms *(Travel by train and you will get to know your new classmates by the end of the long journey, Travel by train or else you won't get to know your new classmates by the end of the long journey)* shows a high degree of control of this structure. The skilful alternation of the various forms within a script provides evidence of the candidate's knowledge of the grammatical system of the language.

The construction of all grammatical structures is governed by rules. The candidates' awareness of these rules and their familiarity with the exceptions can also serve as evidence of their grammatical knowledge. For instance, in the case of

the basic sequence *verb + to infinitive (manage to come, forget to do)* the verb *help* represents an exception since unlike most other verbs in this pattern it can be used without the preposition *to (They helped organise the camp)*. The more extensive the candidates' grammatical knowledge is the more likely it is that the exceptions they include in their scripts will be used correctly.

Finally, a candidate with a good command of English can use grammar not only to express an idea correctly but also to make sure that the idea is expressed appropriately in a particular situation. For example, in a job application letter the sentence *I want to know more about this job* is grammatically accurate but inappropriate. The appropriate sentence for the writing situation in which the writer addresses a reader he does not know personally can be, for example, *I would like to know more about this job*.

Mastery thus means that the candidate can use grammar effectively and appropriately for the communication situation. Raters may decide to award points for candidates who use a range of grammatical structures even if they are not always used correctly.

Grammatical accuracy

Besides the range and degree of skill with which candidates can handle grammatical structures, accuracy is a basic feature that raters consider in the assessment of grammatical knowledge. Grammatical errors are as varied as the number of grammatical structures that exist in the English language, but a distinction is generally made between two types of errors: **local errors** and **global errors**. Those errors that affect single elements within a sentence (e.g. inflections, articles, quantifiers, auxiliaries) and do not significantly interfere with the meaning of the sentence are called local errors. Examples of such errors are the following:

The first problem is <u>that</u> how to get to that place.
It is difficult to use, so you had better <u>to</u> buy another one.
I'm sure that you have found the electrical appliances and <u>it didn't</u> give you any problem.
I think <u>hire</u> a bus is better than travelling by train.
I couldn't <u>finished</u> cleaning the kitchen.

The first two sentences can be understood easily: the reader only has to disregard the unnecessary elements *that* and *to*. The third sentence contains an agreement error that a reader usually corrects automatically *(it → they)* without losing track of the writer's thoughts. Although the last two sentences contain inflection errors, they can also be understood because the context clearly indicates that in the last but one sentence the writer intends to say *hiring a bus,* and in the last sentence the auxiliary verb can only be followed by the bare infinitive form of the verb *(finish)*.

Errors that affect the whole sentence (e.g. wrong word order, missing verb or subject) to such an extent that it becomes difficult or impossible to understand are called global errors. The following sentences cannot be mended with minor modifications:

Of course much more comfortable.
Even, we've got too much, and we always waste our time.
Because they are can find a place when every body can and want to go then can find programs and exercise to do on it.
For the class trips are the most popular in a camp-site and a colige, because in there doing it some interesting thing.

They contain such structural problems that render them incomprehensible and thus lead to communication breakdown in the scripts.

Local errors are therefore considered minor errors whereas global errors are major errors. The question arises whether specific types of errors can only be categorised as either local or global errors. For instance, must the incorrect use of a tense always be considered a minor error? The answer is most probably *no* because the seriousness of an error depends on its effect. The same error may be understood in one context and may hinder communication in another one.

From the point of view of its effect on communication, it is difficult if not impossible to decide without a context whether an error type constitutes a minor or major error. Therefore, even if a comprehensive list of all the possible English grammar errors were available, they could not be categorised automatically as minor or major errors. Raters must examine all the errors in their contexts so as to be able to decide to what extent they affect communication before they can label them as either minor or major errors.

The identification of faulty grammatical structures is important for the assessment of the grammatical knowledge of candidates. Raters should make sure, however, that while they are assessing grammatical knowledge they do not concentrate only on erroneous grammatical structures. The correct structures must also be taken into consideration: raters must weigh incorrect grammatical structures against the correct ones before awarding a mark. Unlike an interview in an oral examination, a script can be reread as many times as it is necessary to take a reliable inventory of correct and incorrect instances of grammar. This does not mean that the rater must count, for example, all the correct and incorrect instances of article use in a script. Such an approach would make the rating process an extremely time-consuming activity. Instead, raters must base their judgements on the types of errors (local or global) and the ratio of correct and incorrect structures identified in the script.

Error tolerance

When assessing grammatical knowledge, raters must check first whether the errors they have identified in a script belong to the same category or to different categories. Candidates must not be penalised repeatedly for the same grammatical error.

Furthermore, candidates are usually penalised differently on the basis of the type of errors found in the scripts. Errors that do not obscure meaning tend to be tolerated, whereas those that lead to the breakdown of communication are penalised.

The Grammar criterion in the scale developed for the Hungarian Model writing examination

The third criterion in the writing scale developed for the Model examination is called Grammar (Figure 10.1) and it is used to mark both lower and higher level scripts. The descriptors of the bands draw raters' attention to two features of the scripts that they must focus on: the range of grammatical structures and the frequency and nature of inaccurate structures. A small number of grammatical errors that do not hinder understanding are tolerated even in the highest band; however, errors that disrupt communication are always penalised. In assigning a score for the Grammar criterion, raters are indirectly prompted to weigh the amount of grammatically correct language in the script against the amount of grammatically incorrect language.

	Grammar
7	• wide range of structures • few inaccuracies that do not hinder/disrupt communication
6	
5	• good range of structures • occasional inaccuracies hinder /disrupt communication
4	
3	• limited range of structures • frequent inaccuracies hinder/disrupt communication
2	
1	• no range of structures • mostly inaccurate
0	no assessable language

Figure 10.1. The Grammar Scale

The description of what raters must pay attention to when assessing grammar is given in the guidelines accompanying the writing scale (Figure 10. 2).

Check	Look for
Grammatical range – is there a range of grammatical structures?	– variety of grammatical features (tenses, structures, modals, auxiliaries, etc.) used – proportion of accurate / inaccurate sentences and clauses
Grammatical accuracy – is the grammar correct?	– the occurrence and reoccurrence of specific mistakes – bad grammar leading to unclear meaning

Figure 10.2 Guidelines for rating Grammar

Raters use the same scale and guidelines to assess the grammar in the scripts produced by both lower and higher level candidates. The differences in the requirements are explained in the description of the level-specific expectations (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Level-specific expectations for the Grammar criterion

Lower level	Higher level
– good degree of grammatical control – correct use of a variety of simple structures – local errors that do not hinder understanding – few global errors	– high degree of grammatical control – correct use of a variety of structures – a few local errors that do not hinder understanding – practically free of global errors

At the lower level candidates are expected to have good control of a variety of simple structures. They must be able to formulate a series of short grammatical sentences communicating clear if simple ideas. A number of local errors that do not hinder communication can be tolerated since the emphasis in this examination model is laid on the successful communication of the intended message.

At the higher level confident control of a wider range of grammatical structures is expected. Candidates must be able to produce a variety of sentence types (simple, compound and complex) of varying length to communicate complex ideas. Some local errors are also acceptable at this level provided that they do not result in misunderstanding. Few global errors are tolerated since candidates taking the higher level examination are expected to produce scripts that are free of grammatical errors which obscure meaning.

Frequently asked questions in connection with the Grammar criterion

Why should I not write any comments or put any kind of symbol or mark on the scripts themselves?
The script is to be marked by two raters and the corrections of the first rater would influence the second rater.

Shall I distinguish between serious and minor grammatical errors?
This distinction is made on the basis of the type of error. Local errors are considered minor and global errors are considered major errors.

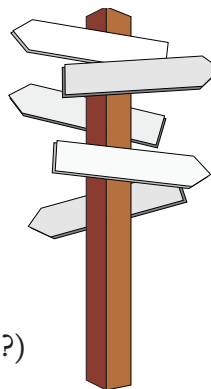---

The Hungarian Model Examination: Lower level

This section introduces a lower level task together with its task-specific rating scheme and sample scripts. The task and scripts are discussed from the point of view of the Grammar criterion.

Sample lower level task

The lower level task given below instructs candidates to write an article about class trips. Candidates are expected to write about 180 words, which allows for the elaboration of the subtopics given in the task and the use of various grammatical structures.

Your school has an English language student magazine and you want to write an **article** for it about what makes a good class trip. Look at the notes below and write about the different possibilities. Give reasons why you think one is better than the other.

- How to travel? (Train? Hire a bus?)
- Where to stay? (Camp site? Hotel?)
- What to eat? (Fast-food? Food taken from home?)
- Where to go? (Mountains? Towns?)

Write an article of about **180 words** in an appropriate style. Use the title *Tips for a good class trip*.

The task-specific rating scheme for the lower level practice task

Content points for raters

- introducing the problem (what makes a good class trip)
- means of transportation (train vs. bus)
- accommodation (camp-site vs. hotel)
- eating (fast food vs. food from home)
- destination (mountains vs. town)
- rounding off (the article must not end abruptly)

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an **article** in about **180** words
- cover content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- express their opinion and support their choices
- use comparative structures, (modal) auxiliaries
- use appropriate style for genre and target audience (fellow students)
- use language to express likes / dislikes, argue for and against options

Note: The genre (article for student magazine) allows the use of colloquial expressions and contracted forms in order to achieve the desired effect on the target reader.

The requirements regarding the grammatical structures expected in the case of this writing task are not described in detail. However, by consulting the task it can be concluded that besides comparative structures and auxiliary verbs other structures could also be used to compose the script. Candidates must include in the script a variety of comparative structures in order to compare and contrast the aspects of class trips given in the content points; nevertheless, such comparative structures can be realised not only with the use of the different comparative forms of adjectives, but also with sentences that are constructed so as to compare or contrast the various features of class trips. Also at sentence level raters can expect some complex sentences because the language of reasoning may require subordination, for instance with the use of the subordinators *because* and *since*.

Candidates are expected to give advice to their readers, so they may use conditional sentences to express what they would do if they had to make decisions about class trips *(I would rather …, If I were you …)*. Both in the conditional sentences and in other sentences whose function is to give advice or express preferences, candidates can use modal verbs *(would, should, must, could, might)*. In addition to these predictable structures, candidates may use other structures that become necessary as the result of their elaboration of the subtopics given in the task.

Sample analysis of a script

The candidate attempting the lower level writing task managed to include in the following script of 216 words a good range of grammatical structures and demonstrated the ability to construct a variety of sentences.

Tips for a good class trip

What makes a good class trip? – that's a good question.

First of all the class should choose the best way to travel.

The most common options are usually the train or the bus. Both has advantages but usually travelling by train is much cheaper but less mobile. So if a class wants to make some short excursions from a base point I would deffinetly choose the bus. Than the other problem is the accomodation.

I think the best option for that problem is somwhere half way between the camp-sites and hotels. It's called youth hostels. They are built for youths. And altough they are very well equipped they aren't expensive.

The problem of food is the third. It's a hard question. If we want a cheaper trip, I would prefer food taken from home. But than we have to spare time for making it. Fast-food is the other alternative. It's more expensive, but one has fewer problems with it. We can also try canteen if there is any in the youth hostel or somwhere nearby.

And finally we have to decide where to go. In the towns there are lot of free time fascilities, while in the mountains you can make some nice trips. I think the best option would be a town in the mountains.

The candidate used an impressive range of comparative structures. There are adjectives used in the positive, comparative and superlative forms *(good, fewer, the most common)* and all the comparatives and superlatives are correctly formed. The candidate gives evidence of the ability to handle irregular comparative forms *(good class trip – best option, more expensive – most common option, less mobile),* and uses *much* in the sense of *a lot* to modify a comparative adjective: *much cheaper.*

Throughout the script, the candidate constructs and skilfully alternates simple and complex sentences, which makes the text read well. Comparison and contrast is also realised at the level of sentence structure. In the sentences

> *And although they are very well equipped they aren't expensive.*
> *In the towns there are lot of free time fascilities, while in the mountains you can make some nice trips.*

the candidate contrasts respectively the advantages and disadvantages of youth hostels and those of towns and mountains. The first one is realised with a concessive clause and the second with two co-ordinated clauses joined with the contrastive conjunction *while* meaning *whereas.*

Additional structures that appear in the script are conditional clauses, modal auxiliaries *(have to, should choose, can, would),* passive constructions *(it's called, are built, food taken from home),* and a large number of articles only a few of which are used incorrectly *(the accommodation, are lot of free time)*. The candidate also gives evidence of the ability to construct complex grammatical structures such as *have to spare the time for, have to decide where to go,* or *the best way to travel.*

Considering that the script was written for the lower level of the Model examination, it can be considered to contain a wide range of structures that qualify it for Band 7. The second descriptor in this band states that a script worth the score of 7 includes few inaccuracies that hinder or disrupt communication, and the analysed script meets this criterion too. Besides the erroneous article uses, there are some agreement errors in the script *(both has, if there is any),* and a word order error *(The problem of food is the third),* but they do not lead to loss of meaning. Nevertheless, because of the high number of occasional inaccuracies the candidate cannot be awarded a score of 7 points, and the benchmark for grammar for this script is therefore 6.

Sample lower level scripts

The following five scripts were written by candidates for the lower level examination on the task presented above. Read the scripts and study the marks and justifications given for each script for the Grammar criterion. When you read the scripts and their evaluations, you should refer to the Grammar scale (Figure 10.1), the Guidelines for rating Grammar (Figure 10.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Grammar criterion (Table 10.1), and the task-specific rating scheme.

Script 01

Tips for a good class trip

I've been on a class trip for several times, but it doesn't mean that all of them were good. I was just wondering what makes a good class trip. Most important: the mood of the trip depends on the class – if your classmates are great, than your trip will be great too. Don't worry about the programmes, just let things go their own ways! For the trip, you should hire a bus so that you can go whenever you want – it's a bit expensive, but it doesn't cost a fortune! If you stayed in a hotel, I would say you are crazy! In a hotel you can't do what you want, you can't be loud, but in a camp site! Camp site is the best for the youth. You can make there bonfire so you can cook and you don't have to worry about what to eat. I'm sure you won't eat your sandwiches, your Mum made for you at home, so if you want you can eat fast food either. I am sure you'll find a Mc Donald – they are all over the Earth! If you like trips you can go to the Mountains, but if I were you I would go there, just with my best friends. Not everybody likes wearing warm clothes all the time and being in the nature whole day. With my class I would go to town, where everyone could go out if he or she wanted to.
    I hope I could help you.

(250 words)

Score for Grammar: 7

Justification: The candidate uses a variety of tenses (present perfect, present continuous, present simple, future), conditional clauses types 1 and 2, modal auxiliaries *(should, can, could, have to)*. Complex structures: *just let things go their own ways, go whenever you want.* There are correct complex sentences; a few sentences are incorrect *(In a hotel you can't do what you want, you can't be loud, but in a camp site!).* Word order problem: *You can make there bonfire so you can cook and you don't have to worry about what to eat.* Article problems: *Camp site is the best for the youth, You can make there bonfire.* The inaccuracies do not disrupt communication.

Script 02

Tips for a good class trip

The first problem is that how to get to that place. I think to hire a bus is better than travel by train. In the bus we are together, but on the train the class is devided to different parts of the train. The negative thing is that the bus may be more expensive than the train. But if you have a hired bus, you can go everytime, everywhere. The cheap-expensive question is due to the next question: if you go to a camp-site, it will be cheaper. Of course the hotel is much more comfortable. I think it depends on the situation. On a class trip you can eat in a restaurant or the food taken from home. I think both of them available on a trip. For breakfast it is good to eat cold meal, which has taken from home, but for dinner is better to eat in a restaurant. And finally, as for the 'where to go question', I think it is better to go to the mountains. In the mountains you are alone in the nature. There is fresh air, marvellus landsight and space, silence. But this is my personal oppinion, of course the human culture is in the towns, which is important too.

(208 words)

Score for Grammar: 5

Justification: Varied, complex sentence structures and grammar (comparative, passive, there is, auxiliaries, conditional, infinitives). There are a lot of mistakes that do not hinder understanding: *problem is that, is better than travel* instead of *travelling, on a class trip, both of them available, has taken from, for dinner is better to eat, the nature, the human culture, which is important too* instead of *and that is important too.*

Script 03

Tips for a good class trip

I would like to give some pieces of information how to make a good class trip. So first you will have to look for an adult who is reliable and who is able to responsible for you. The second task is you have to decide where you will go. For example I think it is worth going to a town. Then you have to reserve a youth hostel or a camp. If you sleep in a camp you can make your foods or you can take food from home. After that you should hire a bus or you can take a walk to the destination. If you took a walk, this would be healthy but if you choose the first one you will be sure that the journey will be comfortable and fast. If you are ready with these you have to talk about the programes. I think in the morning you can visit museums and other things which is famous, after that in the evening you can go to the town and look for some entertainment place where you can enjoy yourself.

Have a good journey.

(187 words)

Score for Grammar: 5

Justification: There are a few tenses used (present, future); future not used correctly all the time *(first you will have to look for)*. Complex structure: *I think it is worth going to a town.* Conditional clauses types 1 and 2 used correctly. Correct irregular plural: *some pieces of information.* Modal auxiliaries *(should, can).* Some of the problems: missing preposition in *information how to make a good class trip;* incorrect structures *is able to responsible for you* and *things which is famous* disrupt the flow of the text.

Script 04

Tips for a good class trip

Would you like to travel with your class but you don't know what possibilities would be better for you? Here are some good tips for a good class trip!

Decide, if you want a cheap trip or an interested trip! If you want a cheap one you should go by train but you chose other you can go anywhere by bus.
Where to stay? Partly it depends on your comfortable-feeling because you don't like being in camp-site it is worth being in a hotel. Sure, you can pay it.

The eating is very hard because everybody likes other food like you. It is worth taking food from home and look for a cheap and good "restaurant"!
Sure you won't agree where to go mountain or town? Do you like climbing? No? Then let you go to town! Do you like going out at night? you can just do it in a town. At least you can go out together in a mountain.

(162 words)

Score for Grammar: | 4 |

Justification: A range of different structures (auxiliaries – *should, would, can,* like + to inf/-ing form) and structures for giving advice, but there are several inaccuracies that hinder understanding. Some unclear bits due to missing words (e.g., *because you don't like being in camp-site it is worth being in a hotel, like/than*). Other clumsy bits are (*but you chose other…, Sure you won't agree …, Then let you go to town!* etc.) Some problems with articles *(the eating, in camp site, in a mountain).*

Script 05

Tips for a good class trip

I think the good class tripps base is the group. On the good trips is one group and not a two or three or many groups. Firs you can find a place where you can go and you can feel good yourself. I now that not easy because each of people want to go otherwere were the us can. Because they are can find a place when every body can and want to go then can find programs and exercise to do on it. That good if the trip are 3 or 4 day longest. The best of the travel is the train because it's interesting and slow. On the trains people are talk and jok and do good group things. For the class trips are the most popular is a camp-site and a colige, because in there doing it some interesting thing. On the first day the people are eat food from home and the next days are eat fast-food or eat in a restaurant.

(166 words)

Score for Grammar: 2

Justification: All simple present forms and the auxiliary *can*. Some good bits *(where you can go, on the first day, food from home),* otherwise broken English throughout. Mostly inaccurate with recurring basic mistakes – missing *there,* missing predicate *(… that not easy; that good …),* overuse of *BE* in all forms *(they are can find…; people are talk).* Several incomprehensible parts (*otherwere were the us can; and want to go then can find programs and exercise to do on it;* etc).

Lower level Grammar rating practice

The previous section introduced a sample task and presented the Grammar scores and their justifications for a number of scripts. In this section another lower level task is introduced together with sample performances. Use the Grammar scale (Figure 10.1), the Guidelines for rating Grammar (Figure 10.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Grammar criterion (Table 10.1), and the task-specific rating scheme provided below to mark the scripts for Grammar. Make sure you document your decisions by making notes about the reasons why you award or subtract points. When you have finished rating the scripts, refer to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

Lower level practice task

The following practice task is a transactional letter writing task in which the candidate must write a formal letter to the headmaster of a school and request information about the school.

You have a 10-year-old brother. Your parents would like to send him to an English-speaking school. They have read this advertisement in a Budapest newspaper:

British International School

➤ British international education for students aged 5 to 19
➤ Academic and personal development
➤ Foreign languages
➤ Social, cultural and sporting programmes

For more information, write to: Dr. Paul Gregg, Headmaster
Budapest, H-1113 Pasa u. 8.

Your parents have asked you to write a letter to the headmaster of the school. In your letter say:

• why you are writing

and ask about:

• the subjects taught in the school
• class sizes
• the school uniform
• the fee to pay

Write a letter of about 100-120 words in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Dr. Gregg,

_____

_____

_____

The task-specific rating scheme for the lower level practice task

Content points for raters

- introduction / purpose of writing
- asking about school subjects
- asking about class sizes
- asking about school uniform (if any)
- asking about fee
- closing

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write a **formal letter** in about **100-120** words
- cover the content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- vary the structures of questions
- use appropriate style (formal and polite)
- use modal auxiliaries

Lower level practice task scripts

Script 01

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I'am writing because I read your advertisement in a newspaper. I think this advertisement is very good. I have a lot of questions about this school.

   I have a brother who 10 years old. My parents think that the foreign languages is very is very important. They said me, write a letter for Dr. Gregg. My parents would like to send my brother in this school, but they have some question. I don't know that how many children learn in a class. My second question that what subjects do the schools teach? I would like to know that. Have the school uniform got? And my last question that how much is it?
I think if you send me a letter, my brother would go to this school.

(127 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 02

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I'm writing to you in order to ask for informations about your school.

My 10-year-old brother wants to go to an English-speaking school, and my parents think that British International School would be good for him.

I would be very grateful if you can write me about the subjects taught in the school.

I'm also very much interested in the sizes of the classes.

Please write me about the clothing in the school. If there is any school uniform or not?

It would be very nice of you, if you can write me about the paying, because my parents want to know about it as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance,

Yours faithfully:
B.M.

(114 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 03

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I am writing to you, because I've read the advertisement of your school in a newspaper and I would like to know more about it. My ten-year old brother is supposed to attend an English speaking school.

I would like to know more about the subjects you teach in that school, which are the most popular with the students and what kind of other subjects you teach besides foreign languages.

I'm interested in how big the classes are and I would like to know if they have to wear a school uniform and if we should have it made or we can buy it in your school.

I have another important question: how much is the fee that we have to pay? Because we are not so wealthy and I would like to know if there's any chance to pay it in parts. I'm looking forward to your answers.

Yours sincelery:
A.G.

(151 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 04

Dear Dr. Gregg,

I write for you, because I read the advertisement of your school. We would like to send my brother, John King to an English-speaking school.

I would like to ask some questions. I would like to know which subjects are taught in the school. Only human subjects or realistic subjects, too? What kind of class sizes are in your school? Do the students have to wear the school uniform? If there is uniform, do we have to make it? How much fee do we have to pay in a year? Which foreign languages are taught in the school? Can the students sport? And which social, cultural and sporting programmes are there?

I wait your answer, thank you very much.

G.K.

(119 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 05

Dear Dr. Gregg,

The reason why I am writing this letter is that I would like to have more information about the British International School. My parents have read the advertisement and they would like to send my 10-year-old brother to an English-speaking school.

    First of all I would like to ask about the subjects which are taught in the school. How many subjects are there and in which languages do the students have to learn them? And what kind of foreign languages can the students learn? I read in the article that this education system is for students aged 5 to 19. What does it mean? For example my 10-year-old brother in which class can learn? Are the classes about the students knowledge?

    And do the students have to wear a school uniform, and if your answer is yes, please tell me something about it. And I have a very important question, what is the prise of the school, how much do we have to pay for a year? I hope you will answer my letter.

Your sincerelly:
E.F.

(176 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

KEY: Justifications and Scores for Grammar

Script 01

Several good clauses with accurate word order *(I'm writing because I read your advertisement; I think this advertisement is very good; I have a lot of questions about this school. My parents think that the foreign languages; I would like to know that)*. Some range of structures. However, there are many inaccuracies: *brother who 10 years old; languages is very important; they said me, write a letter; letter for Dr. Gregg; send my brother in this school; some question;* reported questions *don't know that how many; my second question is that what;* conditional. Wrong use of *would;* preposition *in*. Question word order and reported speech errors. A problem with subject-verb agreement *(Have the school…)*. **Score: 3**

Script 02

Good range of structures (present simple and present continuous), good word order and subject-verb agreement, a passive phrase *(subjects taught),* infinitive for purpose, present conditional *(would)*. Inaccuracies do occur: conditional *if you can* (2 instances); plural *informations;* question *If there is any school uniform or not?* The text can be understood. **Score: 5**

Script 03

The candidate uses a wide range of structures, practically error-free. There are two inaccuracies (*to pay the it in parts,* plural – *looking forward to your answers*). Candidate varies complex and simple sentences well and makes no word order mistakes. Variety of question types: direct and indirect. **Score: 7**

Script 04

Good range of interrogative sentences (incorrect: *Can the students sport?*), some instances of passive and auxiliary use. Good word order. Incorrect tense *(I write for you.) I wait your answer* is incorrect and should not be written in one sentence with *thank you very much.* **Score: 5**

Script 05

The candidate uses a wide range of structures, almost error-free (present simple and continuous, present perfect, simple past, auxiliaries, passive). There is one inaccuracy that does not hinder understanding *(my 10-year-old brother in which class can learn)*. Candidate varies complex and simple sentences well. Too many sentences joined in the last but one and second sentences. **Score: 6**

The Hungarian Model Examination: Higher level

The previous section illustrated the marking of lower level scripts for Grammar and presented sample scripts for practice. The following section illustrates and provides practice in marking higher level scripts. Use the information given in the Grammar scale (Figure 10.1), the Guidelines for rating Grammar (Figure 10.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Grammar criterion (Table 10.1), and the task-specific rating scheme provided with the task to mark the scripts.

Sample higher level task

The following is a higher level writing task that instructs candidates to write an article for an international student magazine.

No Kidding, an international student magazine, has invited readers to share their views about the computer. Write an article to give your opinion and advice to other students.

Include the following points:

- computers in education
- computers and entertainment
- health issues
- computers and relationships

Write your **article** with the title given. Write about **200 words**.

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

_____

_____

_____

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample higher level task

---

Content points for raters

- introducing the topic
- giving opinion on computers' role in education
- giving opinion on computers' role in entertainment
- giving opinion and advice on health issues
- giving opinion and advice on computers and relationships
- conclusion

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an **article** in about **200** words
- cover the content points
- express opinion, support arguments, give advice (giving advice could be incorporated in different parts of the text)
- use adequate paragraphing
- use appropriate language for genre and audience (fellow students)

Sample higher level scripts

Script 01

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Nowadays computers became more and more important not only in education or entertainment but all the other areas of life.

Firstly let's take the most significant part, the education. You could get ECDL diploma about computers. It's absolutely necessary because it is acknowledged in the European Unio and you can become acquainted with these machines.

You could also have fun with your computer across the Internet. If you join the Net you will meet a lot of interesting people and you can speak or play with them. It can be a great fun to search on the webs. And last but not least you could learn a lot this way. If you have problems you will find solutions. There is numberous person who first "met" on the Net and now they are married and live happily. Sometimes perhaps you think that it's unbelievable but it can happen. It's so important to know about the world a lot and it is easy with the computers. But on the other hand it's true that computers are expensive. And it has harmful effects especially on your eyes and you can easily fall into that trap to sit in front of the computer all day instead of have a walk or a picknick.

What is the conclusion? I think computers have more good effects on our life than bad. But you have to find the balance between dealing with a computer and other useful things.

(241 words)

Score for Grammar: 5

Justification: Good range of structures including present tense forms, conditional, passive, auxiliaries *(can, could, will),* infinitives, comparatives, *there is.* Inaccuracies occur: *Nowadays computers became, There is numberous person, fall into that trap to sit, instead of have a walk…, our life, but …. all the other areas of life, across the Internet* (missing/wrong preposition), *the education, ECDL diploma, a great fun* (article problems), *It's so important to know about the world a lot* (wrong word order).

Script 02

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Computers make our lives easier. "It's not necessary for every single child to have a top-machine just to play their stupid little games." – say the critics. But is this true? Let's find that out!

Many kids have computers nowdays. But the evolution of these machines is unnoticably fast and if the kid wants to stay "topmodisch" – as the Germans say, the mummy and daddy has to pay a great amount of money for all the hardware and software pakages. So 1 minus point.

But the child has to play with something and the computer is a great way of learning for the young ones and an even greater way of playing for the older generation. So 1 plus point.

Some say that monitors make harmful radiation. Well (shortly) you can buy a TFT (LCD) display if you want to and that has no radiation at all. +1 point.

Another thing is that the kids live an unhealthy life because the sit and play with computer 24/7. All I have to say is:

"Kids you could go out sometimes and play outside games (and not with your computer!)!"

(187 words)

Score for Grammar: 5

Justification: Not very good range of grammar. Inaccuracies do not hinder understanding. Some variety of auxiliaries *(has to play; could go out sometimes),* solid use of present but no other tense forms. Infinitive structures and comparatives are used well. Mostly accurate.

Script 03

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Computers are really important machines in our century. Computers are more and more important.

In the schools there are lots of computers and we also have computer lessons. In the secondary schools there are special classes where the students have more C.S. lessons than in the other classes. Nowadays the Internet is a popular thing for entertainment. But lots of children like computer games. I don't like those children who always sit in front of the computer, because it's healthier doing some sports. This is connected to the health issues. Your eyes become worse, you have to wear glasses and it's important to be in the nature and relax. You can go running or playing basketball or anything else. If you have computer you can send emails to different people from the world. So this is a good thing, because you can know lots of people. But at the same time you can be lonely because you can't meet these people, only in the computer and people need a kind of company. Computers as we can see have advantages and disadvantages too.

I don't like computers but I know that there are a lot of useful thing with it. You can learn more about things in that you are interested, and it's a good thing if you have internet too. But the life is not only about computers.

(228 words)

Score for Grammar: 5

Justification: Good range with *there are,* infinitive structure *(important to be),* passive *(is connected to),* solid use of comparatives, modals *(have to, can).* Complex sentence structure and conditional clauses. Some inaccuracies *(a lot of useful thing; things in that you are interested),* problems with articles *(If you have computer; the life is not only about computers)* that are occasionally disruptive.

Script 04

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

The computer is our friend. It was created to help our lives, jobs and it gives us a new kind of entertainment. Most computer in a workplace are connected to the internet which can give a whole new dimention of comunication and finding articles of a question.
Computers in education: more and more schools are buying computers to teach the students how to use certain programs like Word excel and use the internet. This is where the education turns into entertainment. Children also like to listen to music and play with games and one of the newest entertainment is chatting with each other which can bring people together and can make new relationships.
The bad side of computering is that the monitor can be harmful to eyes, but I think new monitors will prevent eye problem.

(136 words)

Score for Grammar: 4

Justification: Good use of present tense forms, passive structures and infinitives *(more and more schools are buying computers, It was created to help our lives),* relative clauses. Not a wide range of auxiliaries, but *can (can make new relationships),* and *will* are used appropriately. Correct comparative and superlative forms. There are inaccuracies: omission of articles – *Most computer, in a workplace, dimention of comunication and finding articles of a question, how to use certain programs like Word excel and use the internet, will prevent eye problem.* Too many errors in such a short script.

Script 05

The Computer – Friend or Foe?

Our world has changed at the end of the 20th century. A lot of new things were invited, and the bio-technic improved a lot. It is said that this century is the century of computers. We can read about computers from the begining of the 20th century, but the real machines were invited in the 70's. Nowadays it is so common that it is used in education. There are a lot of ways of using it but the main way is to teach languages. The computer can help prounancing the words for even an hour and it isn't unpatient. This is a very useful way of using but there are some more, useless functions of it. One of them is the computer games. It is said that it proves the reflexes but it's only part of the softwer progressing companies' marketing.

The monitor can even harm the eye, so it's a bit dangerous playing for hours opposite the computer. A lot of secretarys lives on disability because of that. It may seemed that computers has only harmful effects, but on the other hand it gives us an ability to communicate with our distant kin. We can hear that a lot of lost members of families found by the internet. I can't make a decision of the computers. Everybody should look through the facts and decide.

(225 words)

Score for Grammar: 4

Justification: There is a range of structures (variety of tense forms, passive, there are, infinitive structure, auxiliary: *can* and *may*), but the number of inaccuracies shows that their use is problematic (inappropriate tense – *has changed at the end of the 20th century;* inappropriate passive – *members of families found by;* inappropriate infinitive structure – *can help prounancing, It may seemed*). Recurring mistake: no agreement between subject and predicate *(A lot of secretarys lives; computers has).*

Higher level Grammar rating practice

The previous section provided practice in rating higher level scripts for Grammar. In this section another higher level task is introduced together with sample performances and your task is to mark the scripts for Grammar and give justifications for your marks.

Higher level practice task

Use the Grammar scale (Figure 10.1), the Guidelines for rating Grammar (Figure 10.2), the Level-specific expectations for the Grammar criterion (Table 10.1), and

the task-specific rating scheme provided with the task to mark the scripts written on the following task for Grammar. Make notes about the reasons why you award or subtract points. When you have rated the scripts, go to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

> You met Wanda in a Warsaw summer school, where you practised English with Central European students. She is visiting you next month. Write her a **letter** about:
>
> • *your trip home from Poland*
> • *a good time you had recently*
> • *what you will show her in Hungary*
> • *a Hungarian custom*
>
> Write a letter of about **200 words**. Do not write any dates or addresses.
>
> *Dear Wanda,*
>
> _____
> _____
> _____

The task-specific rating scheme for the higher level practice task

Content points for raters

• a short opening to tell Wanda who is writing
• a description of the trip from Poland
• a description of any event when the student had a good time
• some notes on sights or programmes the student will show Wanda
• a description of a Hungarian custom
• closing the letter

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

• write an **informal letter** in about **200** words
• cover content points
• use adequate paragraphing
• use description
• use narration
• use a variety of tenses

Higher level practice task scripts

Script 01

Dear Wanda,

I'm so happy hearing about your coming next month. I'm planning what we will do during the week you'll spend here in Hungary.

What would you like to do? Would you rather go to museums or relax? Anyway, there are some places that you must see. For example the House of Terror in Budapest from which you can learn a lot about Hungarian history. If we have the opportunity to visit the Parlament, we won't miss it. But don't be afraid, in the evenings we'll have great parties here in Eger too. Hungarians can relax and we are the master of entertaining. You will get used to the Hungarian habits. I'm sure of that we will spend here a fantastic time together.

Have I told you my trip home from Poland? It was such a funny journey. I met a cute spanish guy on the bus and we became friends very soon. Although it was a long way, I didn't feel it because we were talking during the whole trip. His grandparents are living in Hungary not so far from Eger, so we could meet us later too. Do you believe this? You should meet him!

Anyway I had very nice time in Warsaw and I hope you will have also in Hungary. Fat kiss for you and the others.

   Love: Romy

(221 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 02

Dear Wanda,

How are you? I hope you are fine. My homeward travel was very calm. I travelled by train, because for me it is preferential, because (of) my father works at the Hungarian Railway.

When you will come to Hungary, I will show you almost the whole country. First the capital city, Budapest and then the typical areas of the country. My favourite region is Szatmár. You know I am dancing in a folkdance group, and we've got a dance from Szatmár. It is a very nimble-footed dance. The national costume is Hungary is very exciting. It has a lot of petticoats and a headdress. When you will come I will dress you in a Hungarian costume. I hope you like this idea.

Best wishes:
Vali

(124 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 03

Dear Wanda,

I'm writing for you, because I know you will come to Hungary next month, and I hardly can wait the time. You know Warsaw was very exciting and interesting, but the traffic... Hardly I can get to the station, after a traffic jam which contains many and many cars. So finally I arrived to the station, the train was late, I thought I was lucky. But not at all. The train wasn't late, it had have a crash near the city. So I had to wait and wait and wait for the next one. And after a 5 hours waiting, finally I started the journey to the airport. After that everything going quite smoothly. Funny story, isn't it?
Anyway I had a very good time in Poland and I think you had too. People were very friendly and the food was very good. Do you remember when we ordered something to eat and we didn't really know what it was. Oh that was very funny. I live in a small village so rather I will show you the capital city Budapest, especially the Parlament and many and many interesting places. But there is a famous thing in my village, the old church which was built in the 14. century.
I think in Hungary the food is good. We have several customs, but I will tell you when you are here. So I wait for you in November. I think you have a good time.

Yours faithfully, George

(246 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

Script 04

Dear Wanda,

I am writing to thank you for that good time I spend with you in Warsaw. My trip home from Poland was very exhausting. It took about two hours and to tell the truth I don't really like travelling by air. But I was satisfied with the service and the kind stewardesses.

Anyway I really enjoyed everything in Warsaw. The school was very interesting and I was fascinated by the beauty of the city.

When you come to Hungary I will also show you the sights of our country. I think we should start with the capital. But there are also a lot of other places of interest in the rest of the country.

By the way. It reminds me one of our customs that we always have the tourists or guests tasted with typical Hungarian meals. For example with Goulash soup.

I must end now. I hope to see you soon. Please let me know the date of your coming.

<div align="center">All the best,</div>

(164 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification: _____

Script 05

Dear Wanda,

I'm sorry for not writing to you until this time, but I had so many things to do here at home. My trip from Poland was very interesting. I met a boy who made me always laughing until the end of the trip. I'll talk about him when you'll be here in Hungary.

I had some good time since I came Hungary from Warsaw. Two weeks after I got home my parents surprised me. I got a (very) sweet cat. (You know I've lost my 8-eight-year cat in April, and I liked very much her.) After it my parents and me had a beautiful holiday in Hawaii!

I hope you'll come to Hungary in a few weeks' time, because I'd like to show some famous and interesting places (here in Hungary) like: the Parliament, Lake Balaton, the Alfold and my favourite town: Debrecen. Debrecen is a beautiful place where you can find a Basilika, a beautiful inner town, etc. I hope you'll enjoy it. And please don't worry about our customs!!! I think we are very kind people. I know you'll like our special foods, like: Hungarian goulash. We like enjoy ourself, dancing (it can be modern or a beautiful folk art (dance)). I hope you'll enjoy the time you spend here! I'm waiting for your arriving!

Love: xy.

(218 words)

Score for Grammar:

Justification:

KEY: Justifications and scores for Grammar

Script 01
The candidate used questions, modal *(must),* if clause, and a variety of tenses (simple past, present, future; present continuous). Good, complex sentence structures. The range is very good but there are occasional inaccuracies (present continuous – *hearing …coming,* agreement – *master of entertaining,* preposition – *told you my trip,* preposition – *so we could meet us,* articles) that do not disrupt communication. **Score: 6**

Script 02
No range of grammar: the candidate uses present and past simple, questions, *have got.* There are several errors in this short script: *when + will* (twice), preposition, tense. The sentences are simple. **Score: 2**

Script 03
The candidate uses a good range of structures (modals: *can, had to;* tenses: present continuous/simple, past simple, future simple; *when + present tense* used correctly; indirect question; passive: *which was built*) but there are frequent inaccuracies, especially in the first part of the script (wrong word order but ambitious attempt: *I hardly can wait, Hardly I can get to the station, so rather I will show you;* tense: *which contains, it had have a crash, After that everything going quite smoothly, you have a good time;* preposition: *I'm writing for you, arrived to*). **Score: 4**

Script 04
Good range of structures (past/present tense, *should, there are, when + present tense, like + ing,* complex sentence structure). There are some errors. One of them *(we always have the tourists or guests tasted with typical Hungarian meals)* disrupts communication. The other errors are *spend* (tense), *reminds me* (missing preposition), *the date of your coming.* Many errors in a short script. **Score: 5**

Script 05
There is a good range of grammar (present continuous, past simple, future; relative clauses – *boy who, place where;* complex structure: *in a few week's time*) but frequent inaccuracies hinder communication (causative: *made me laughing;* tense: *when you'll be here in Hungary, I had some good time since, I've lost …in April,* sentence structure: *I hope you'll come to Hungary in a few weeks' time, because I'd like to show some famous and interesting places (here in Hungary) like: the Parliament, Lake Balaton, the Alfold and my favourite town: Debrecen. Debrecen is a beautiful place where you can find a Basilika, a beautiful inner town, etc. I hope you'll enjoy it;* agreement: *we enjoy ourself;* prepositions). **Score: 4**

Implications for teaching

Anything that happens in the language classroom in terms of grammar teaching is relevant to the students' use of grammar in their writing. What follows is a brief

discussion of what could be added to regular classroom practice in order to improve the accuracy of students' writing.

In preparation for writing, students can be asked to write a list of the grammatical structures that they think they will need to complete a writing task. When they have written their scripts, they can be asked to compare the structures used in their scripts with those on their lists. They can also read each other's scripts and check the grammatical structures their peers used. Alternatively, they can tell the teacher what grammar they used and the teacher can write a list on the blackboard. The point of the exercise is to make students aware of the range of grammatical structures that they can use in a writing task. Teachers should encourage students to display as much of their knowledge of grammar as the task allows because raters usually award higher scores for scripts that contain a wide range of grammatical structures.

Once students have mastered the basic forms of realisation of grammatical structures, they should be taught alternative realisations of the same grammatical structures. This way teachers can enhance students' ability to avoid repeating the same form of a grammatical structure. Such a skill is useful for example in scripts that require candidates to write a lot of questions: alternating the form and type of questions can break the monotony caused by a string of questions. Similarly, placing relative clauses in different parts of the sentence and using various relative pronouns can show raters that the writer has a high degree of control over this grammatical structure.

The sentence transformation exercise is a common type of exercise that can be used for improving written texts. By practising the formulation of the same idea with the use of different grammatical structures, students can be shown techniques to avoid the same structure repeatedly in their scripts.

Accuracy is important, but teachers need to be careful not to inhibit their students by placing too much emphasis on grammatical accuracy. Poor writers who focus primarily on grammatical accuracy fail to write well-developed scripts. Their main concern is to be correct, they then spend their time rereading the sentences they write and as a result may lose track of their train of thought and fail to complete their scripts.

Teachers should train students to revise their scripts by focusing firstly on content and only secondly on accuracy. One reason for this is that it makes little sense to spend time on editing a text that may have to be changed because of its content. This is especially important in an examination where candidates have a limited amount of time to write.

Students need to be trained how to revise their scripts. If time allows, they should read their scripts several times, each time focusing on a different type of grammatical structure. Usually students read their scripts from the beginning to the end several times and yet fail to recognise their errors. This happens especially when the script must be edited right after it has been written. When they write home assignments, students can put their scripts aside when they are done, do a different exercise or study something else, and after some time they can return to

their texts. By now they will probably have forgotten their script and developed some distance to their scripts. If they read it, they are more likely to spot errors.
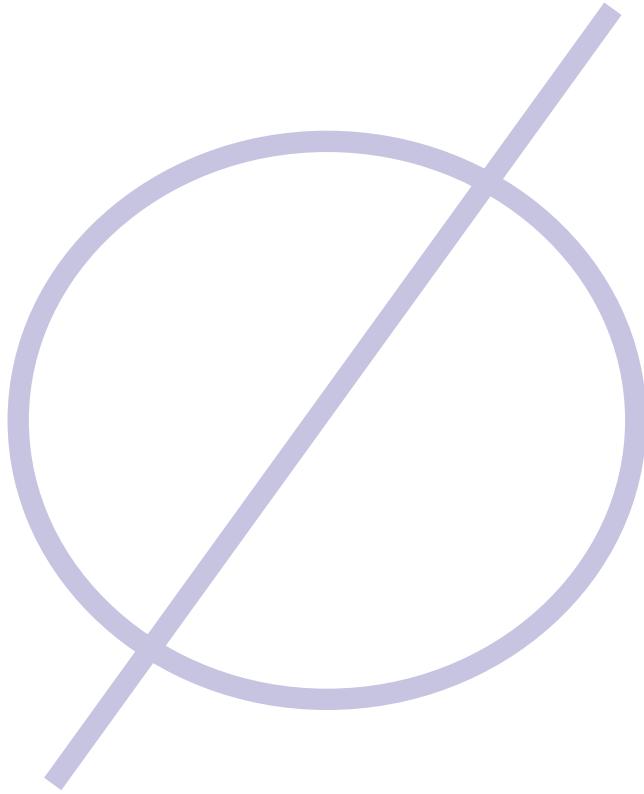
This technique can also be applied in an examination situation. If the writing paper consists of more than one task, candidates should proceed to the second task as soon as they have completed the first one. Having finished the second task, they should return to the first task and edit it. Since they have to focus on a different task, candidates develop a distance to the first script and may be able to spot errors that they would not recognise otherwise.

If there is only one writing task, candidates can use another technique to spot errors. They should read their scripts backwards, moving sentence by sentence from the end of the script towards its beginning. This unnatural way of reading makes it possible for the reader not to focus on the message of the script but on the individual sentences. When readers follow the sentences from the beginning to the end of the script, their attention is focused on the message communicated and may fail to notice errors.

Giving feedback on accuracy is a technique that can draw writers' attention to their errors. There are various techniques available for giving feedback (e.g. minimal marking when the teacher only underlines the mistake or marks with a number next to each line how many errors there are in the line; or the use of correction symbols). Teachers could use any of these techniques to avoid correcting all the mistakes. This is especially the case when students can be asked to redraft their scripts. If the teacher corrects the mistakes, the redrafting is likely to turn into a copying exercise in which the writer produces a clean copy of the script without paying attention to the errors. If, however, students have to correct the mistakes highlighted by the teacher, they may benefit more from the exercise, for example, they may learn to identify particular mistakes that they make on a regular basis.

Thus, in order to become better writers, students must be taught to use grammar correctly and appropriately, to construct their scripts by consciously incorporating a variety of structures, and to revise their scripts. It is important that they develop the habit of correcting errors only after they have revised the script for content. Accuracy errors can be left to the end and can be attended to together with vocabulary errors. The revision of vocabulary is similar to that of grammar and will be discussed in the next chapter, which examines the last criterion in the scale developed by the Hungarian Examination Reform Project: Vocabulary.

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Chapter 11
Vocabulary

General description of the Vocabulary criterion

The Vocabulary criterion in an analytic scale is intended to assess the breadth and depth of candidates' stock of foreign words (e.g. single words, compound words, idioms), and of the skill with which they can handle them. Breadth refers to the number of different words they know, and depth describes their awareness of the different meanings and uses of a particular item. For instance, the meaning low-level learners associate with the word "kid" is *child*. More proficient learners know that this word also means *the young of a goat* and *the soft smooth leather made from its hide*. Furthermore, proficient learners also know that "kid" can be used not only as a noun but also as a verb meaning *to tease or deceive for fun*.

Knowing a word in writing means that candidates can use it correctly to express the exact meanings they want. For this they must know what a word refers to ("dog biscuit" is *a hard biscuit for dogs*), what its connotation is (the overtone of the word *ogre* is negative), what other words it is related to in meaning (*generous* is the synonym of *unselfish* and the antonym of *tight-fisted*). Moreover, candidates must be aware of how words combine in a sentence: words tend to co-occur with specific words (they collocate) and language learners must be able to combine the appropriate items. For instance, *hand over* does not go so naturally as *pass* with the words *the salt*. Candidates must know how they can build other words by affixation (adding a prefix, *unhappy,* or a suffix, *happiness*), compounding (*mouse* and *trap* form *mousetrap*) or conversion (same word used as different parts of speech: *a laugh* v. *to laugh*). Candidates must also be able to reproduce words correctly in writing, in other words they must be able to spell correctly.

Measures of vocabulary quality

In a general language proficiency examination, vocabulary is assessed on the basis of **range, relevance, sophistication**, and **correct word choice and usage**. Raters therefore must know what each of these features refers to, and based on this knowledge they should be able to generate an overall score for the vocabulary criterion. As in the case of the Grammar criterion, raters must also make sure that they weigh weaknesses against strengths before deciding the score for the Vocabulary criterion. It is bad practice if raters assess the vocabulary of a script by only taking into account the weaknesses.

In the assessment of vocabulary a distinction is made between two types of words in a script: **content words** and **function words**. Content words are the words that fall within the category of nouns, lexical or full verbs (e.g. *come, work*), adjectives and adverbs. Function words, such as auxiliaries *(can, should),* pronouns, conjunctions or prepositions, play a mainly grammatical role. When assessing vocabulary, raters focus on content words.

Range

Range refers to the candidates' ability to use an adequately broad vocabulary within a script. A script that contains a large number of different words is awarded a higher score for vocabulary than a script in which a limited number of words and phrases are used repetitively. Candidates can avoid repetition, which is interpreted as a sign of poor vocabulary, with the use of synonyms or superordinate terms (i.e. using a general term instead of a word: *animal* instead of *cat*). Raters must, however, make a distinction between repetition that originates from poor vocabulary and repetition that has a well-defined function. As was discussed in the chapter on Cohesion and Coherence, good writers do repeat *key* words and phrases in order to achieve unity and coherence.

Range must be interpreted in relation to the task set. Each task requires the development of a particular topic or subtopics, which determine the type of vocabulary that candidates are expected to use. For example, in the case of a task that instructs candidates to write an advertisement for a house, the words that raters look for in the script refer primarily to the type of the house, its characteristic features, and its cost. In a testing situation raters can assess only the sample of the candidates' vocabulary elicited by the writing task and therefore have to determine the range *within* that sample.

Range also depends on the required length of the script. A longer script allows for more repetition and variety. Therefore, raters must keep in mind the length of the script when they evaluate the range of vocabulary.

Relevance

Closely connected to the writing task is the feature referred to as relevance of vocabulary. The writing task determines the topics and subtopics candidates must develop, and raters must assess whether the vocabulary used by the candidates meets the requirements of the task. These requirements may be specified in the task-specific rating scheme designed for the task and can vary from the direct identification of the nature of the expected vocabulary (type of house, special features, or cost in the case of the advertisement task discussed above; or the vocabulary of shopping in a composition about shopping habits) to such general descriptions as the type of language needed for the completion of the task (e.g. vocabulary appropriate for the expression of an opinion or formulation of a complaint). Thus, whereas raters assess whether candidates write about the set topic under the Task Achievement criterion, they evaluate under the Vocabulary criterion whether candidates can use words relevant to the topic.

Lexical sophistication

Lexical sophistication refers to the ability of candidates to formulate their ideas succinctly, neatly and articulately. Candidates with good vocabulary skills use precise and effective words that are appropriate for the topic and with the help of

which they can convey their ideas with clarity and conciseness. They can use their vocabulary to formulate complex ideas clearly, and can express themselves fluently. In order to be able to give evidence of lexical sophistication, candidates must have a broad vocabulary, must be able to express exactly what they want to communicate, and must be able to combine words so that the resulting text reads fluently and naturally. In other words, candidates must know a large number of words, their grammatical class, rules of word formation, and collocational patterns.

Correct word choice and usage

Vocabulary errors can be grouped into errors that relate to **meaning**, **form** and **spelling**. One of the most frequent errors is the use of the wrong word to express an intended *meaning*. For example, in the sentences

> *You can <u>journey</u> by train.*
> *I want to <u>learn</u> the American culture.*
> *You will get used to the Hungarian <u>habits</u>.*

the words that best represent the intended meanings are *travel, study,* and *customs* but the wrong synonyms are used to express them. Similarly, candidates often confuse two words that are closely related but opposite in meaning. In the sentences

> *I <u>borrowed</u> my friend some money.*
> *Hotels in any country serve meals but if they don't, I think you should <u>bring</u> some food with you.*

the confusion is caused by the closeness in meaning of the words *lend* and *borrow* and *bring* and *take* respectively.

Another type of meaning-related error is caused by false cognates, also called false friends. These are words that have similar forms in two languages but do not have the same meaning. For Hungarian learners of English *actual* is a false friend when it is used instead of the word *current*.

> *Who is his <u>actual</u> girlfriend?*

The candidate writing the question

> *Are <u>human</u> subjects or <u>realistic</u> subjects taught?*

made use of the Hungarian cognates *humán* and *reál (tantárgy)* instead of the correct English equivalents *arts* and *science*.

When candidates do not know a word, they can combine existing English words to express an idea. They may use circumlocution to describe or define something if they do not know the appropriate word. For example, in the sentence

> *The cheap-expensive question is due to the next question: if you go to a camp-site, it will be cheaper.*

the candidate avoided using the word *price (The question of price is …)* by replacing it with two adjectives that make clear what the missing word is. Circumlocution is therefore a strategy suitable to compensate for gaps in vocabulary, but its overuse results in a text that is difficult to read and understand.

Candidates, however, are not always successful in their attempts to compensate for limited vocabulary. For instance, on the basis of its content the most probable intended meaning of the following question

> *Are the classes about the student's knowledge?*

is

> *Are the students sorted into groups according to their language knowledge?*

but it is obscured by the ineffective original wording.

Another way candidates may try to make up for gaps in their vocabulary is by coining English words. The words *comfortable-feeling* and *lexical books* used in the sentences

> *It depends on your <u>comfortable-feeling</u>.*
> *They want us to know many things that can be found in <u>lexical books</u>.*

do not exist in English. The correct wordings should be something similar to *expected comfort level* in the first sentence and *dictionary* in the second .

While the above list of errors is not exhaustive, it illustrates the frequent types of errors that lead to loss of meaning in scripts. The task of the rater is to recognise vocabulary errors that lead to loss of meaning and assess the extent to which they affect the overall meaningfulness of the script.

Errors that relate to **form** are caused by the candidates' inadequate mastery of word form: they are not accurate and effective enough in affixation (the use of prefixes and suffixes) and compounding. For example, the candidates who wrote the sentences

> *It can be <u>freshing</u>.*
> *This can have <u>irreversible</u> effects.*

knew the roots *fresh* and *reversible* but failed to build the correct adjectives by adding the prefix *(re-)* to the root to get *refreshing* and by placing the correct prefix *ir-* before the root to form *irreversible*. A similar derivational error occurs in the following sentence

> *Decide if you want a cheap trip or an <u>interested</u> trip.*

where the wrong suffix *-ed* is added to the root *interest* instead of the correct *- ing*. The candidate who wrote the sentence

The time of your <u>visiting</u> comes closer and closer.

failed to form the noun *visit*. Similarly, the candidate who wrote

You will see that it is not a <u>solve</u> for your problem.

could not transform the verb *to solve* into the noun *solution*.

Besides such derivation errors, candidates often use the wrong form of a word to express their ideas. In such cases the word does not fit into the sentence. The candidate who wrote

Can the students <u>sport</u>?

used *sport* as a verb to mean *to do sports;* however, this conversion is incorrect in English.

Multi-word words, words that consist of more words (e.g. prepositional verbs, phrasal verbs, idioms), and **collocations** (words that commonly occur together) represent yet another source of vocabulary errors. The sentence

We <u>arrived to</u> Borgáta at about 12 o'clock.

illustrates a frequent prepositional verb error. Hungarian learners of English frequently use the preposition *to* instead of *in* after *arrive*.

In the following two sentences

We <u>made</u> a lot of photos.

and

I couldn't only make new <u>friendships</u> but also show to the American teenagers what is my culture like.

candidates altered the idioms. The correct idioms are *to <u>take</u> photos* and *to make new <u>friends</u>.*

Whereas idioms are made up of a group of strongly connected words that are learnt together as one word, collocations represent relationships between words and are not taught as fixed expressions. Language learners gradually develop a sense of what words or types of words can be used together with a particular word as their language knowledge develops. The following sentences illustrate collocation errors:

We had to stop because there was a <u>big</u> rain.
You can <u>look at</u> TV on the bus.
I will need English for my business <u>journeys</u>.
This would mean new job <u>possibilities</u>.

The candidates used the words *big, look at, journey,* and *possibility* with the intended meaning but in the inappropriate context. The combinations *big rain, look at TV, business journey,* and *job possibilities* are wrong because in these contexts the correct collocates are *heavy, watch, trip* and *opportunities.*

Closely related to idioms and collocations is the type of writing error usually labelled *wrong expression.* This is a label raters use to identify a vocabulary error that cannot be fitted into any of the above-discussed categories: the words used in the sentence are English words that are used correctly and yet the sentence does not read naturally in English. For instance, the second half of the sentence

> *I could also get acquainted with the Italian language itself, which resulted in a progress in the level of my Italian.*

communicates the candidate's message, but it is not an acceptable alternative for the expression of the idea that the candidate's command of Italian improved as a result of the time spent in Italy.

Aspects of vocabulary use typical to the assessment of writing

Spelling and lifting are two aspects of vocabulary that are relevant primarily to the assessment of written texts. Spelling is especially important because incorrect spelling can impede communication.

Misspelling is a type of error that is closely associated with vocabulary and therefore it is assessed under the vocabulary criterion. Besides its meaning, grammatical category and pronunciation, language learners also learn the way in which a word is spelt. When assessing vocabulary, raters distinguish minor and major spelling errors and check the consistency of spelling. Minor spelling errors do not change words to the extent that their recognition becomes difficult: *tripp – trip, sincerelly – sincerely, can not – cannot,* or *termal – thermal.* Major spelling errors alter a word to such an extent that it becomes very difficult to recognise *(colige – college, extercis – exercise),* or its spelling becomes identical with that of another item *(tripe – trip, sweat – sweet, were – where, now – know).* The violation of the spelling of words that receive special emphasis in teaching *(than – then, whether – weather)* is also considered a major spelling error.

Consistency in spelling is another problem that concerns the raters of written texts. Writers should use the spelling typical of one national variety of English consistently. For instance, the spellings *favour* (UK) and *favor* (US) or *summarise* (UK) and *summarize* (US) should not be used in the same script.

Lifting refers to candidates copying part (e.g. continuous stretches) of the input text into their own scripts, and it becomes a problem that raters must focus on when the writing task contains input text(s). Candidates who have not been trained to avoid lifting may copy into their scripts without any changes, for instance, parts of a sample letter to which they must write a reply. Raters cannot accurately assess the language skills of candidates whose scripts contain language given in the task because it is not lifting skills that they must evaluate but the

candidates' ability to use their own language skills to produce continuous writing. Whereas lifting in itself affects the score awarded for the vocabulary criterion, it can also be the source of vocabulary (and grammatical) errors because candidates are often unable to build the lifted text correctly into their own scripts.

Error tolerance

It is rarely the case even at the highest levels of a language proficiency examination that raters expect candidates to produce completely error free scripts. At lower levels a larger percentage of errors and error types are tolerated. Errors that do not obscure meaning are more generally accepted than those that lead to the breakdown of communication. Nevertheless, a script with a large number of minor vocabulary errors may be awarded a lower score for the vocabulary criterion.

As in the case of the assessment of Grammar, raters must check whether it is the same vocabulary error or different errors that occur in a script. Candidates must not be repeatedly penalised for the same vocabulary error: raters must make a distinction between frequent errors and repeated instances of the same type of error.

Furthermore, some examination boards encourage their raters to treat more leniently errors due to ambition. A script that contains correct but simple vocabulary is of lower quality than a script which shows individuality in word choice and attempts more ambitious expression of ideas, even if, as a result, this is not always correct.

Dictionary use

Some examination boards allow the use of dictionaries while others do not. In spite of the fact that allowing the use of dictionaries may seem to have advantages, it has been shown that it also has disadvantages. The advantages are that candidates can check, for instance, the correct orthography of words *(*formula one / Formula One)*, their spelling *(*beleive / believe),* grammatical behaviour *(*I can look him after / I can look after him),* collocation patterns *(die of hunger / a hunger for adventure),* derived forms *(friend, friendless* adj., *friendlessness* n., *friendship* n.), synonyms, or meanings. They can also look up the unknown words they find in the rubrics and thus make sure that they understand the instructions.

However, the (mis)use of dictionaries may lead to problems. Candidates may look up and place words into their scripts without checking whether the item fits their text. They may also miscopy words and misinterpret the abbreviations in the dictionary entries.

Candidates using a dictionary take longer to complete the writing task, and their scripts may be shorter yet not of significantly better quality than those written by candidates who do not use a dictionary. Dictionaries can be especially disadvantageous for candidates of lower proficiency levels. Such candidates do not use the dictionary as a *checking aid* but spend a lot of time looking up words and as a result they lose their train of thought and write less than the specified word limit.

Candidates spend even more time looking up words when they are allowed to use bilingual dictionaries.

Raters must take into consideration the effect of the dictionary on the scripts. The vocabulary of a script written with the help of the dictionary should be assessed differently since candidates draw on resources different from their own language knowledge and make errors that are not necessarily caused by deficiencies in their vocabulary knowledge.

The Vocabulary criterion in the scale developed for the Hungarian Model writing examination

The last criterion in the writing scale developed for the Model examination is called Vocabulary (Figure 11.1). According to the descriptors of the bands, raters must assess scripts for the range, accuracy and relevance of the vocabulary used. The descriptors for accuracy state that (depending on the frequency with which they occur), raters must tolerate those vocabulary errors that do not lead to the breakdown of communication. Starting with Band 3, the descriptor for relevance includes another aspect of vocabulary that must be taken into consideration: lifting. The fact that this aspect only occurs in the lower bands of the scale does not mean that only weak candidates are expected to lift text from the input. On the contrary, it means that, for instance, a script with a wide range of accurate and relevant vocabulary that communicates clear ideas but contains some chunks lifted from the prompt cannot be awarded a score of 7. Its score can only be 5, the mean of Band 7 and Band 3.

	Vocabulary
7	• wide range of vocabulary • accurate vocabulary communicating clear ideas • relevant to content
6	
5	• good range of vocabulary • occasionally inaccurate vocabulary communicating mainly clear ideas • overall relevant to content
4	
3	• limited range of vocabulary • frequently inaccurate vocabulary communicating some clear ideas • occasionally relevant to content with some chunks lifted from prompt
2	
1	• no range of vocabulary • mostly inaccurate vocabulary, communicating few clear ideas • mostly irrelevant to content with several chunks lifted from prompt
0	no assessable language

Figure 11.1 The Vocabulary Scale

Raters are given the detailed description of what they have to pay attention to when assessing vocabulary in the guidelines accompanying the writing scale (Figure 11.2).

Check	Look for
Lexical range – is there a range of vocabulary items?	– variety of words and expressions used
Lexical accuracy – is the vocabulary used accurately?	– words used accurately / inaccurately (meaning and spelling)
Lexical relevance – is the vocabulary relevant to the topic(s) specified in the task?	– relevant vocabulary / irrelevant vocabulary – ratio of words and expressions not lifted / lifted from task

Figure 11.2 Guidelines for rating Vocabulary

Raters use the same scale and guidelines to assess the vocabulary of scripts written by candidates for both the lower and higher level examination. The requirements of each level are explained in the level-specific expectations (Table 11.1).

Table 11.1 Level-specific expectations for the Vocabulary criterion

Lower level	Higher level
– sufficient vocabulary for expressing ideas about everyday life/familiar topics and situations – good control of straightforward vocabulary – clear expression of simple thoughts – some spelling errors acceptable	– range of vocabulary for personal/familiar and unfamiliar/general topics – high lexical accuracy – some hesitation/circumlocution – errors (wrong/incorrect word choice, spelling) do not hinder understanding – clear expression of complex thoughts

Lower level candidates are expected to have sufficient vocabulary for the correct expression of simple ideas about everyday topics and situations. At the higher level candidates must have richer vocabulary that allows for the accurate expression of complex ideas not only about personal but also about general topics and unfamiliar situations. If wrong word choices occur but do not hinder comprehension, they are acceptable. At both levels raters should focus on the kind of spelling errors candidates make. Frequent and meaning-obscuring spelling errors are penalised by lowering the score by one point, whereas occasional errors that do not disturb meaning should not be penalised.

> **Frequently asked questions in connection with the Vocabulary criterion**
>
> *How shall I treat misspelled words?*
> Spelling mistakes lower the mark by one band if the problem is persistent.
>
> *When is the candidate's range of vocabulary wide?*
> Depending on task and length requirement, the script should contain several relevant verbs, nouns, a few idiomatic expressions not lifted from the prompt. In addition, a few adjectives and adverbs, if relevant, can enhance effectiveness and thus contribute to wide range.
>
> *What am I to do if the candidate has lifted a lot of the vocabulary from the rubrics but is using them appropriately and without errors?*
> It is acceptable if such items are isolated words used in paraphrased structures. The best way to decide this is to write the task yourself, then you will see whether it is easy to avoid lifting of any kind or not.

The Hungarian Model Examination: Lower level

This section introduces a lower level task together with its task-specific rating scheme and sample scripts. The task and scripts are discussed from the point of view of the Vocabulary criterion.

Lower level task

The lower level writing task is a formal letter of application. The candidate has to reply to an advertisement which is short and concise, so it does not contain long stretches of text that would encourage lifting.

> **You would like to work in England for a year. You have read this advertisement in a magazine:**
>
> > **SECRETARY WANTED URGENTLY**
> > Word-processing experience required.
> > Minimum intermediate level English.
> > Italian useful but not essential.
> > To apply write to:
> > THE GIANNI VALDO ORGANISATION
> > The Capital House, Oak Road, Colindale, London
> > NW9 OED
>
> Write a **letter** of application.
>
> In your letter write about:
>
> - why you are writing
> - your education
> - your word-processing experience
> - your language skills
> - when you could start the job
>
> Write a letter of about **120 words** in an appropriate style. Do not write any dates or addresses.
>
> *Dear Sir or Madam,*
>
> _____
> _____

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample lower level task

The vocabulary elicited by the task is defined by the content points listed in the task-specific rating scheme. With the exception of the first and the last point, the content points name topics whose development requires the use of specific vocabulary.

> **Content points for raters**
>
> - introduction / purpose of writing
> - education
> - word-processing experience (needed)
> - language skills (minimum intermediate English, Italian not essential)
> - starting time for the job
> - closing

Since the content points clearly establish the nature of the vocabulary raters can expect, it is unnecessary to specify it in the summary of the requirements.

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write a **formal** letter in about **120 words**
- cover the content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- use appropriate style (formal and polite)
- realise communicative function: a mix of giving information and persuasion

---

Sample analysis of a script

The following lower level script, with a benchmark of 6 awarded for the Vocabulary criterion, illustrates how a lower level proficiency candidate uses a range of appropriate and sufficiently accurate vocabulary to describe the abilities and experience of an applicant.

> *Dear Sir or Madam,*
>
> I was interested in your advertisement that I read in a magazine and I would like to apply for the job.
>
> I finished the secondary school two years ago. Since we learnt type-writing and how to use word-processors, I am very good at both of them. Due to an Italian friend of mine, I worked for an Italian company as a secretary, so I have the experience of being a secretary. I can make all the machines operate, that a secretary works with. I could also get acquainted with the Italian language itself, which resulted in a progress in the level of my Italian. I also passed the intermediate language exam in English a year ago.
>
> I returned home from Italy a month ago, so I do not have a job at the moment. I can start to work whenever you want me to start. I can also go for an interview in any time.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> B.Zs.

With the exception of the education content point, the candidate produced enough language in the body of the letter without lifting any expressions from the task to make possible the evaluation of the range of the vocabulary used. The range of vocabulary shows that the candidate can use a variety of words to develop the subtopics given in the task. Table 11.2 presents a summary of the words that contribute to range in this script.

The same table illustrates that the words used in the script are relevant. The candidate did not develop topics that are not directly in connection with the task set. When candidates write about topics that are not required by the task, raters cannot award extra points for vocabulary even if the irrelevant topic is discussed with an excellent variety of words because these items are not relevant to the task.

Table 11.2 Words contributing to range

Content Point	Words
education	*to finish school, learn type-writing*
wordprocessing experience	*to be good at, work for a company as a secretary, have the experience, operate machines*
language skills	*resulted in progress, level, pass a language exam in …*
starting time for the job	*to return home, whenever, go for an interview*

In spite of the range and relevance of its vocabulary, the script does not meet the requirements of a highly sophisticated vocabulary. It does not read fluently and naturally throughout because of occasional wrong word choices and the ineffective wording of some ideas. The wrong word choices that break the smooth and natural flow of the text are *was* instead of *got* in *was interested*, *due to* instead of *thanks to* in *due to an Italian friend*, *get acquainted* instead of *learn* in *get acquainted with the Italian language,* or the preposition *in* instead of *at* in *in any time*. The remaining disturbing lapses are due to the unnatural wordings that raters refer to as wrong expression of ideas. The chunks *have the experience of being a secretary, make the machines operate,* and *resulted in a progress in the level of my Italian* are understandable but strange in English. The ideas intended to be communicated are expressed in a non-native like manner. The idea formulated by *have the experience of being a secretary* can be rephrased as *I have already worked as a secretary, make the machines operate* does not read as naturally as *operate the machines,* and instead of the pretentious yet inappropriate *resulted in a progress in the level of my Italian* chunk the candidate could have written *improved my Italian.*

With the exception of *type-writing,* the script is free of spelling errors. The candidate manages to communicate the ideas with enough clarity for the reader of the application letter. Considering the fact that this is a lower level script, in spite of the above lapses raters can reward the candidate for the ambitious if not always successful attempts at expressing complex ideas creatively.

Sample lower level scripts

The following five scripts were written by candidates for the lower level examination on the sample task presented above. Read the scripts and study the marks and justifications given for each script for the Vocabulary criterion. When you read the scripts and their evaluations, you should refer to the Vocabulary scale (Figure 11.1), the Guidelines for rating Vocabulary (Figure 11.2), the specifications of the Level-specific expectations for the Vocabulary criterion (Table 11.1), and the task-specific rating scheme.

Script 01

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm writing because I have seen your advertisement in a magazine. I'm really interested in this kind of job, so I'd like to applicate for it.

I have secondary school's final exam in several subjects (history, mathematic, hungarian grammar and literature, geography and English language). Now, I'm a third-year student of the lawyer class at the university in Budapest.

I have an intermediate level of English language and a basic level of German language. I can speak a bit Italian because my grandmother is Italian.

I know you're looking for a person who has word-processing experience, but I learn quickly and I have a lot of ambition.

If you would employ me I could start work in the end of the year, after my exams.

I like challenges and I'd like to learn the English language deeper.

I'm waiting for your answer.

Your sincerelly.
xy

(144 words)

Score for Vocabulary: 5

Justification: Good range of relevant vocabulary *(several subjects, basic level, ambition, employ, challenges)* with some incorrect uses *(applicate; lawyer class; mathematic; hungarian grammar; learn the english language deeper)*. No lifting. Some slips in style *(I'm waiting for your answer). Your sincerely* not spelt correctly.

Script 02

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm writing to you because of the secretary job you've advertised in Express magazine. I would like to apply. My name's Zsófia Éltető, I'm 18. I left Kossuth Lajos Grammar School last year. I have learnt English for four years there and passed the intermediate state exam in 1999. And besides this I have also learnt German for 4 years. Unfortunately I can't speak Italian, but I can join a beginner course if it is necessary. In the summer holidays I used to work as a secretary at my mother's company so I have experiences. I can fax you my language diplom and the offer of the company. I could start working in two weeks time.
I hope you'll answer for my application.

Your faithfully

Zs.É.

(125 words)

Score for Vocabulary: 4

Justification: The candidate uses good but basic vocabulary effectively to communicate ideas clearly. However, some key words are used incorrectly *(diplom, offer, secretary job)*. The text is too short to give a reliable picture of the candidate's vocabulary skills.

Script 03

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to you, because I saw your advertisement and I interested about it. I would like to be a secretary in England. I like very much this country and I would like to work there.

I can word-processing and working with the computer. I can speak English, a little bit German and I learning Italian language.

I finished a high school with very good experience. I learnt there word-processing and two languages. (English and German). For example in the school we did a lot of toppic with word-processor. I was in America for two years although it was very interesting I went to school and learnt English. It was my best experience.

If it is good for you I could start the job in September. If it's problem please tell me and I will try to change it.

Thanks everything.

Your faithfully
V.Zs.

(144 words)

Score for Vocabulary: | 3 |

Justification: The student can use vocabulary relevant for the task. The content words not lifted from prompt are *country, computer;* the misspelled *"toppic," problem, change, faithfully*. The rest either lifted or basic words. Clear ideas communicated, but little individuality in word choice. Obviously, the candidate can apply vocabulary from the prompt but does not add much.

Script 04

Dear Sir or Madam,

I would like to apply for this job. I read your advertisement in the newspaper last week and I decided to try getting the gob. My name is Sándor Mezei and I'm Hungarian. I used to work in a hungarian company as a secretary but I resigned from this job because I want to work in abroad. So I have found your job advertisement. I think I will do well this job. I speak three languages: Hungarian, English and Italian. If I get the job, I could start to work at once. I hope I will get the job at least one year.

Your sincerely

M.S.

(105 words)

Score for Vocabulary: 3

Justification: Several, yet often basic words not lifted from prompt: *week, decided, company, resigned from, abroad, sincerely.* This compensates somewhat for the lack of clarity of some ideas. No concrete nouns and verbs beyond a basic level. Limited range resulting from ignoring required elements.

Script 05

Dear Sir or Madam,

I read your advertisement, that you are looking for secretary. I think I would be the best for you to this job. I have a very good world-processing experience. I speak three languages: English, Hungarian and Italian. I know a little bit of spanish, romanian and greec. I learned out to high scools. I have got intermediate level from English and Italian. I like speaking and I now many things about business. I worked three years at the biggest newspaper so I now everything about these things. I don't work for two monts because I was travelled in America. I could start the job imediatly. I don't have children so I'm free all day everyday. If I'm who you are looking for, please, write or call me.

Yours faithfully: Szilárd

(129 words)

Score for Vocabulary: 2

Justification: Simplistic, basic vocabulary. Lifting *(I could start the job)*. Spelling is not consistent *(spanish)* with frequent careless slips (*now* vs know; *monts; imediatly)*. Words are used inappropriately *(very good world-processing experience)*.

Lower level Vocabulary rating practice

The previous section introduced a sample task and presented the Vocabulary scores and their justifications for a number of scripts. In this section another lower level task is given together with sample performances. Using the Vocabulary scale (Figure 11.1), the Guidelines for rating Vocabulary (Figure 11.2), the specifications of the Level-specific expectations for the Vocabulary criterion (Table 11.1), and the task-specific rating scheme provided below, mark the following scripts for Vocabulary. Make a note of the reasons why you award or subtract points. When you finish rating the scripts, refer to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

Sample lower level practice task

The following is a transactional letter writing task. The candidate must write an informal letter to a friend about a day trip.

You spent your last holiday in Keszthely at Lake Balaton. You took a day trip in the countryside with your family. Write a short letter to your pen-friend about it, and use all the information from the illustration.

Write a **letter** of about **120 words** on the lines.
Do not write any dates or addresses.

Dear Chris,

The task-specific rating scheme for the lower level practice task

---

Content points for raters

- introduction (on holiday at Lake Balaton)
- starting out for the trip (time, by car)
- Sümeg (castle, time)
- Borgáta (thermal bath, lunch, many people)
- Kis-Balaton (bird-watching, photos)
- way home (tired, rain)
- closing phrase

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write an **informal letter** of **120** words
- use friendly style and register
- cover content points
- use clear paragraphs and clear thought units
- present ideas in logical order (time sequence used as organisation tool)
- produce a narrative text (use of past tense forms, possible use of other tense e.g. for setting the scene, time expressions, possible use of auxiliaries e.g. had to, etc.)
- use some descriptive adjectives and adverbs

Lower level practice task scripts

Script 01

Dear Chris,

I'm writing my letter from Lake Balaton. I'm staying here for a week. It's a beautiful countryside! We are in Keszthely. Imagine, the second day we have done a tripe. It was quite interesting. We've woken up at 7 o'clock. I was sleepy but my mother has given me a couple of coffee. We have gone at 8 o'clock to the castle of Sümeg. It was beautiful. We were there 1,5 hours, but I think, it wasn't enough. I've bought a little castle for you because I would like, if you see it. It was half eleven, and we have gone to Borgáta. The road was boring, and in the car was a terrible warm. We have arrived at 12 o'clock. In Borgáta there is a termal bath and to many people. The sun shone so we have gone to the bath. There we have eaten our lunch.

(148 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 02

Dear Chris,

Now I'm writing from Keszthely. I'm spending here my holiday with my family. Keszthely is at Lake Balaton, as you know.

Yesterday I took a day trip in the countryside. We started from the hotel at 8 o'clock by car. We travelled to Sümeg and we were in the castle 1,5 hours long.

We had lunch in Borgáta. There's a thermal bath, which is fantastic, and there were many people. But we couldn't spent there as much time as we want, because wanted to watch Kis-Balaton and the beautiful birds. We have taken many photos. At 9 o'clock we had to travel back to Keszthely because it began to rain. The family was tired, but happy.
I hope you'll write me soon. Yours:

(123 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

Script 03

Dear Chris,

In my last holiday I was in Keszthely. Keszthely is a very beautiful country.
The first day at 8 a.m. we went to Sümeg. We were in the castle about 1.5 hours.
That was very interesting. Than we went to Borgáta in a thermalbath. We had
lunch, and known many peoples there. Than we were birdwatching and took some
photos.
In later time we travelled to back. The travelling was very boring. The weather was
bad because it was raining.
I'm was very tired because, I must get up early and than we travelled all day.
But apart from the travelling it was a very good trip, I think.
I hope you'll write soon!
Best wishes

(116 words)

Score for Vocabulary: ☐

Justification: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Script 04

Dear Chris,

I'm writing you again. I spent two weeks in Keszthely, at lake Balaton. I was there with my family. It was good, very very good, and it was not boring!

We had a day trip on Sunday. We got up at 7 o'clock, and after a quick breakfast we left Keszthely at 8. a.m. We went to Sümeg and spent there one and a half hour. The castle was old and beautiful. We drunk a coffee there and after it we left the castle.

We arrived to Borgáta at about 12 o'clock. We had a long bath in Borgáta's thermal water, and after a freshing shower we had a delicious lunch at a restaurant. There was many people who wanted to eat, so the waiter was very busy!

We left Borgáta at 3 o'clock and we went to the Kis-Balaton, where we could see many coloured bird at the lake, and I took many photoes, I'll show them next time!

We went back Keszthely after the birdwatching. We were tired and a summer rain caught us. But finally we arrived there, to Keszthely!

    See you soon

(186 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

Script 05

Dear Chris,

I had a good holiday last year. We spent two month at Lake Balaton. We took a day trip in the countryside. I think, I write a short letter, what happened. We repaired the equipment and we start the trip at 8 a.m. I was very tired. The first station was the castle of Sümeg. This trip was 1.5 hours. We saw the castle, than we go to Borgáta. We go to the thermalbath. We spent a lot of time there. Than we go to the restaurant and we eat a lunch. The lunch was very bad. In the city were many people. The people was very friendly. Than, we go into the car. We go to Kis-Balaton. We made a lot of photos. We watch a lot of bird. Than, we go to Keszthely. The weather was very bad. I'm very tired!

(143 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

KEY: Justifications and scores for Vocabulary

Script 01
Very simple vocabulary with a few spelling mistakes *(tripe; termal)* which do not affect comprehensibility. A misused word *(couple of coffee)*. Most of the words are elementary *(beautiful; interesting; boring)* and there is no range of vocabulary items except for the verbs. Several words are used in an inappropriate way (e.g. *I've bought you a little castle; the road was boring; in the car was a terrible warm*). No chunks lifted. **Score: 3**

Script 02
Good vocabulary communicating clear ideas. In fact there are not too many added words and phrases *(fantastic; happy; as you know, want)* introduced by the author, but they are skilfully used. One chunk is lifted *(took a day trip in the countryside)*. Missing preposition or superfluous pronoun in the closing phrase *(write me soon)*. Somewhat clumsy use of *watch* in the collocation *watch Kis-Balaton*. **Score: 4**

Script 03
Mostly basic vocabulary with some good collocations *(take photos; have lunch, get up early)* and adjectives *(beautiful; very interesting, good; boring),* but otherwise not much added to vocabulary used in prompts and rubrics. Especially poor range of verbs. Consistently misspelled or misused word: *than* instead of *then*. Recurring problems with prepositions, either missing *(The first day we went…)* or misused *(In my last holiday…; In later time…; travelled to back)*. *Travelling* instead of *journey*. **Score: 3**

Script 04
All vocabulary items communicate clear ideas about the subject. Good collocations: *a quick breakfast, delicious lunch, I'll show them next time, summer rain caught us*. Some slips include *freshing, photoes* and inappropriate prepositions *arrived to Borgáta* (also, *to Keszthely*). **Score: 6**

Script 05
Very limited, repetitive vocabulary throughout the letter with chunk lifted from the prompt. Consistently misused or misspelled *than*. Hunglish use of *station* and *make photos*. **Score: 2**

The Hungarian Model Examination: Higher level

The previous section illustrated the marking of lower level scripts for Vocabulary and presented sample scripts for practice. The following section illustrates and provides practice in marking higher level scripts. Use the Vocabulary scale (Figure 11.1), the Guidelines for rating Vocabulary (Figure 11.2), the specifications of the Level-specific expectations for the Vocabulary criterion (Table 11.1), and the task-specific rating scheme given with the task to mark the scripts.

Sample higher level task

The following is a higher level writing task that instructs candidates to write an article for an English-language student magazine. The candidates must give their opinion concerning the building of a shopping mall and its effects.

> You have heard that the local government is planning to build a new shopping mall with a large parking lot right next to your school, at the place where there is a large sports ground now. Your school has an English-language student magazine. You have decided to write for it an **article** with the heading *"Shopping mall or sports ground?"* in which you give your opinion about this plan.
>
> In your article consider the following:
>
> • Which one is needed more?
> • Benefits for the local people
> • Drawbacks for the local people
> • Effect on the environment
>
> Write your article in about **200-250 words**.

The task-specific rating scheme for the sample higher level task

> • introducing the problem
> • choosing the alternative needed more
> • explaining its benefits for local people
> • explaining its drawbacks for local people
> • describing future effects on the environment
> • conclusion

Requirements for raters to consider

The candidates should:

- write an **article** of approximately **200-250** words
- cover content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- express opinion and support arguments
- use appropriate language (modal auxiliaries, comparatives, conditionals)
- use appropriate style for genre and audience (fellow students)

Note: the genre (article for student magazine) allows the use of colloquial expressions and contracted forms in order to achieve the desired effect on the target reader.

Sample higher level scripts

Script 01

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I am fully aware that we are supposed to be a *consumer society,* and I support that. Honest. But when we start to consume things that are a fair bit more important than material belongings, then maybe it's time to stand up and say "back off"! What I'm talking about, of course, is the government's plan to build a shopping mall – parking lot combo where the sports ground is.

Now don't get me wrong I understand the many valid reasons for it. After all, it would make shopping *so* much easier for the locals who have to travel fifteen whole minutes to get to the nearest mall and spend unreasonable amounts of their hard-earned money. Building yet another one here (besides the at least ten other ones scattered around the city) would also make it possible for the more fitness-conscious to jog to the shops, which would indeed fully compensate the loss of the football field that undeservingly occupies so much potential commercial area. Doesn't it?

As you read through this article you are probably thinking "Oh, great, he'll surely go on babbling about the environmental effects and everything." Well, you're wrong. I'm not going to rant about the increased traffic, noise damage, construction waste, and I'm definitely not going to even mention the effect of the mall on the students' mentality.

See here, I'm not judging the authorities or anything. I just feel the urge to voice my opinion and stand up for our rights to our health and pace of life.

(253 words)

Score for Vocabulary: 7

Justification: The candidate uses a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and a lot of idioms suitable for content and audience: *I am fully aware, Honest, a fair bit more important, belongings, then maybe it's time to stand up and say "back off", don't get me wrong, valid reasons, unreasonable amounts, hard-earned money, scattered around, fitness-conscious, undeservingly occupies, potential commercial area, babbling, to rant about, construction waste, to voice my opinion.* The text is free of chunks lifted from the task and spelling mistakes. The candidate shows good command of vocabulary, fluent use, and a sufficient degree of lexical sophistication.

Script 02

Shopping mall or sports ground?

Well I think that it has both advantages and disadvantages. The first advantage is that there are a lot of flats near the school so it would be easier to these people to get things like food, clothes, toys for children and so ….

But on the other hand, it would be a temptation for students and a reason for not to go to school. They would go to the cinema instead of going to the lesions. And the other thing is that we need the sports ground for P.E. lessons and some of us likes to play football and basketball there at the weekends. And we need sports to keep ourselves fit. It's better than spending our money on clothes that we wear just because everybody wears it or a ticket to the cinema.

And the last thing I want to tell you its effect on the environment. We shouldn't cut out the forest just because we want a shopping mal. They manufacture the oxigen that we breath in. And it's a nice place for spending your free time or you can take your dog there for a walk. This forest has a special atmosphere that you should enjoy. We don't need this shopping mal at the edge of the city.

212 words

Score for Vocabulary: | 5 |

Justification: The candidate uses good vocabulary (relevant to content) communicating clear ideas. Good vocabulary: *temptation, reason*. Good examples of collocation: *keep fit, spend our money on, nice place for spending your free time, take our dog for a walk, has a special atmosphere; at the edge of the city*. Inappropriate usage: *manufacture*. There are spelling mistakes: *lesions, oxigen, breath* for *breathe; mal* for *mall*.

Script 03

Shopping mall or sports ground?

In my opinion a sports ground is more important than a shopping mall.
First of all in most of the cities the number of free areas where people can go is becoming less and less. I think it is very bad, because in cities people don't have as many possibilities to get fresh air than they have in the countryside. People living in cities can only go to parks, or sports grounds if they don't want to travel a lot. Moreover sports grounds are useful for children and adults too, because a father can play football, basketball, etc. With his son or daughter so they can spend their free time in fresh air and also they are together.
Furthermore it is good for living a healthy life, since if there's a sports ground around where you live, it is more likely that you go there play rather than watch TV or listen to music, which means that you do not move.
However there are bad points too.
Firstly, installing a new shopping mall would mean new job possibilities. Secondly, people living there would be able to do the shopping in one place and may be in shorter time. There would more place of entertainment, such as cinemas, restaurants and pubs.
At last people would have a bigger choice of goods, which would probably make them feel better.
All in all I think the sports ground would be better for the people and the environment too, and it might make people live a more healthier life.

255 words

Score for Vocabulary: 4

Justification: The candidate uses a fairly good range of vocabulary suitable for the audience; however, there are a few inappropriacies *(free areas, move, installing, job possibilities, at last)*. There are no chunks lifted from the prompt. Spelling mistake: *may be*.

Script 04

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I'm sure, you've heard about the government's new idea. If you haven't, I tell you that they want to build a shopping mall, where there's the sports ground now. I don't know what do you think about this, but when I heard it, I was amazingly shocked. Maybe you know, I mad about sports. I especially like football, basketball, volleyball. Every day after school, I do these relaxing activities, till now.

   I don't know what the people say in the neighbourhood about this, but I think, they wouldn't agree.
There are parents, who has children, and they know, how important doing sports.
I know there are advantages for a huge shopping center. It makes lives much more comfortable. They wouldn't have to go to the greengrocer, to the butcher, and etc. every day, they can buy everything at the same place, and probably on lower price than now, but think about it, how would it effects the environment. Yes, you should think about this view, too.
Building an enormous shopping mall like this is always a hard work.
It would bring a lot of noise, dirt and dust, and it would take a lot of money at all.
My view seems to be a little bit selfish, because I like much more doing sports, than do the shopping.
But this is my own opinion, others can have different view.

229 words

Score for Vocabulary: 4

Justification: The candidate uses a range or relevant vocabulary. A phrase incorrectly lifted from prompt: *where there's the sports ground now.* Wrong word use: *hard work.* Inappropriate uses: *amazingly shocked; It would bring a lot of noise, dirt and dust, and it would <u>take</u> a lot of money <u>at all</u>.* A few more inaccuracies occur *(Every day after school, I do these relaxing activities, <u>till now</u>; effects the environment; Yes, you should think about this <u>view</u>, too.);* however, they do not lead to misunderstanding. Spelling is on the whole correct. Wrong form: *greengrocer, butcher* (missing *'s*).

Script 05

Shopping mall or sports ground?

I think all of us has heard about that our favourite sports ground position is disputed. A new shopping mall is planning to build.

It's difficult to ask the question which is needed more. In my opinion there are to much shopping mall these days. On the other hand there are just a few place where you can spend your free time well. On my view children need fresh air and lots of moving. It's good for health especially after a long and hard day at school. During playing football, basketball it's easy to find some good friend.

You can spend your time in a shopping mal too. You can see a movie or eat in McDonalds after school, and you don't have to travel so much to do the shopping. There are some disadvantages about the traffic. If a new shopping mall build here it will be more dangerous to be on the road. My opinion is that will be really bad for the environment. Just think about the pollution, litter.

All in all I think it's not important to build a new shopping mall.

186 words

Score for Vocabulary: | 2 |

Justification: The candidate used simple vocabulary with a lot of inappropriacies. Spelling mistakes: *to much; mal*. Several words are misused *(position is disputed; moving; see a movie; disadvantages about the traffic)*. Confused words: *ask/answer, moving/move, during/ while*. Overall, the candidate's use of vocabulary is unsatisfactory.

Higher level Vocabulary rating practice

The previous section provided practice in rating higher level scripts for Vocabulary. In this section another higher level task is introduced together with sample performances and your task is to mark the scripts for Vocabulary and give justifications for your marks.

Higher level practice task

Use the Vocabulary scale (Figure 11.1), the Guidelines for rating Vocabulary (Figure 11.2), the specifications of the Level-specific expectations for the Vocabulary criterion (Table 11.1), and the task-specific rating scheme provided with the task to mark the scripts for Vocabulary. Make a note of the reasons why you award or subtract points. Having rated the scripts, go to the Key section and compare your marks and justifications with the benchmarks and justifications given.

You have just heard that ten Hungarian secondary-school students can spend a free year in the USA. They will stay with families and attend a school in Florida. To apply, you need to write an essay for the organisers of the programme. Give reasons for your application.

Here are the notes you have prepared:

- *language practice*
- *other cultures*
- *my culture*
- *new friends*

Using all of your notes, write your **application** with the title given in about **200-250 words**.

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

_____
_____
_____

The task-specific rating scheme for the higher level practice task

Content points for raters

- introducing the situation (occasion and overall reason for writing) and oneself
- effect on language practice
- familiarity with other cultures
- familiarity with the candidate's own culture (how the experience will affect the perception/understanding/appreciation of the candidate's own culture)
- new friends
- closing part

Requirements that raters should pay attention to

The candidates should:

- write a **formal essay** (reasoned application) in about **200-250 words**
- cover the content points
- use adequate paragraphing
- give reasons and support them
- use the language of persuasion
- use modal auxiliaries
- use conditional structures
- use a neutral/formal tone

The task-specific rating scheme for the higher level practice task

Higher level practice task scripts

Script 01

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

There are a couple of reasons why I'd like to spend a year in Florida. First of all, because it's a good opportunity to learn English. I would like to aquire an advanced English language exam. The second reason is that I have never been in the USA, so I would like to get to know the American culture. I think it's so different from our culture, how people behave, what they eat and do in their free time. Maybe it would be interesting for them to get acquainted with the Hungarian culture and someday visit Hungary. There are many fascinating things in our culture, that probably they don't even know about. My last reason is that I would like to meet different people, make friends with people of my age from a different country. Maybe then I could visit them after I came home and they could come around sometime. It would be a great adventure to spend a whole year in a country where I have never been before totally alone and fully independent.

(176 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

Script 02

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

I would like to spend a year in Florida because I'd like to practice. I started learning the English language about eight years ago, and it would be very useful because I need to prepare for my final exam or to take my language exam. But there are other things which are motivate me. For example to become acquainted with other people from other country. I'm interested in other cultures especially the american. I've read about this culture a lot and I suppose it is the most interesting one that I've ever known. I think its differ from my culture very much and it would be very nice to travel to the USA and discover that life. And I would also like to make new friendships and to meet with different people to hear different ideas to see other ways of living and organizing life. I suppose this side of the world is one of the most exiting interesting country that means freedome peace and perfection.

(166 words)

 Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

Script 03

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

Florida is the state of sunshine. there is 'always' summer day. It would be good to spend there a year staying with families. I believe it would be good to know about the culture. There are beautiful beaches where can I go to sunbath and swim in the ocean. The best would be Miami or Orlando, but Tampa wouldn't be bed too. In these cites I can go the basket ball matches like Orando Magic and Miami Heat. There are good NHL (hockey) teams like Tampa Bay Lightning or Florida Panthers.

On the other hand, I want to learn the American culture and I want to make friends with Americans. If someone says Florida everyone associates Miami. Miami is like a real paradise with palm trees and skateing girls in the beach. Miami is the East Coast's L.A., I mean L.A. is the West coast's paradise and Miami is the East side's.

IF I can go there I would be the biggest fan of Miami Dolphins, so they would win the Super Bowl. In Hungary there's no NBA, NHL and NFL so I want to go there to see some matches.

About the school, I would learn much to see these matches. East Coast for LIFE!

(207 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

Script 04

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

I heard about this programme and I would like to spend a year in Florida. I think there are advantages and disadvantages of this programme.

In my opinion that one year is very long time in an other country far from your home, far from your family and your friends. But there are advantages. First of all you would practice the language and you have to be obliged to speak foreign language, you can speak in native language people don't understand you. Of course you will attend a school in Florida, where you can make friends, so you will have more friends, but it's true when you will go home and you will be able to leave them, but you will connect them in letter or in email. When you are in an other country you are able to know other cultures and you are able to show your own culture.

I think it's a good possibility for everybody, so I would like to spend a year in Florida with pleasure, but it's true that my parents and my sister will be missed for me.

(185 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

Script 05

Why I would like to spend a year in Florida

Everyone says and everyone knows that the best way to learn a foreign language is to go to the country where they speak that language. Since I have studied English in the school and haven't spent a longer time in an English-speaking country, this exchange program would be very helpful for me. I would probably lose my accent and would pick up words that I hadn't known before.

I was born and I have always lived in Hungary, so I know the culture very well. In the American school I couldn't only make new friendships but also show to the American teenagers what is my culture like. And, of course, I would pick up some parts of their life-style.

As far as I know the American school system is different from most of the European school -systems and it is almost completely different from the Hungarian. So this exchange-program would give me a chance to get to know how they study in the States.

Hopefully, also, I would get a new, second family abroad, since I would be their "new son". I know it is hard to obtain this but I would do everything for it and I am sure that they also would.

Over all I think I could only gain with this program and I would be really happy and pleased to participate in it.

(227 words)

Score for Vocabulary:

Justification:

KEY: Justifications and scores for Vocabulary

Script 01
The candidate uses a good range of vocabulary *(fascinating, behave, get acquainted with, make friends with, good opportunity to learn English, different from, people of my age, fully independent, totally alone)* with one inaccuracy: *to aquire an advanced English language exam.* The vocabulary is relevant to content. **Score: 6**

Script 02
The candidate uses some range of vocabulary. There is a mix of correct vocabulary and various types of errors in a short text. Instances of good vocabulary use: *take my language exam, to become acquainted with, I'm interested in, especially, other ways of living, discover, this side of the world.* There is an interference mistake *(make friendships).* Spelling mistakes *(american, freedome, exiting).* Other mistakes *(its differ* for *it's different).* The word choice is relevant but not always appropriate for content and audience *(a lot,* starting the sentence with *and).* **Score: 4**

Script 03
The candidate uses good vocabulary *(paradise, I believe, associates)* and communicates ideas with some inappropriacies *(learn the American culture).* The vocabulary is mostly irrelevant to the content specified in the task. There are spelling mistakes *(there, sunbath, bed* for bad, *skateing)* that should not occur at this level. Often inappropriate word choice for content and audience *(I want to go there –* not refined, blunt). **Score: 2**

Script 04
The candidate uses a limited range of vocabulary communicating clear ideas. Inappropriate vocabulary: *you have to be obliged to speak, speak in native language, connect them, you are able to know.* Mostly appropriate word choice for audience, although the script is not fully formal. Spelling mistakes: *practice, an other.* **Score: 3**

Script 05
Good range of vocabulary *(an English-speaking country, lose my accent, pick up words, as far as I know, exchange program, give me a chance, gain, participate in).* Incorrect vocabulary: *make new friendships, some parts of their life-style, to obtain this.* Spelling mistakes: *exchange program/ exchange-program, over all.* **Score: 6**

Implications for teaching

If teachers want to practise vocabulary in order to improve the quality of their students' scripts, they should focus on the three key features of vocabulary discussed in this chapter: range, relevance and accuracy.

   The meaning of range can be shown to students if they have to compare two short texts written on the same topic. One text must be poorly written, the other one must be well written. They can translate the meaning of good range or rich vocabulary by simply tallying the number of content words within the texts.

The relevance of vocabulary items can be explained to students with the help of a brainstorming exercise before writing. Students should be asked to list vocabulary items that they can use when they write about the content points given in a writing task. They can collect the words on their own or in small groups and compare the results. Alternatively, they can tell the teacher the words that belong to a particular content point and the teacher can put them on the board. If any of the words volunteered by the students do not fit the group of words collected for a content point, the class can discuss why they are not relevant for the category. Students must understand that it is the topic that they are writing about that determines what words they should use in their scripts.

When discussing the writing task, teachers should draw their students' attention to the need to avoid lifting several words in a row from the prompt. Students need training in recognising key terms and technical terms that they can take from the prompt and put into their own scripts without being penalised. They should be taught what circumlocution is and given the opportunity to practise it.

Dictionary skills are as important for language learning as for writing. Students should be encouraged to use dictionaries when they write in class or at home. They should use both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries and should learn what kind of information a dictionary can give them. Some examinations allow only the use of monolingual dictionaries. Students need to be taught therefore how to use monolingual dictionaries. The dictionary can be very useful, for instance, for the interpretation of the rubrics.

Teachers should focus especially on such aspects of dictionary entries as spelling and register. Students should be encouraged to use consistently either American or British English spelling in their scripts. They should also learn how they can find information about the register of a particular word.

In an examination situation lower level candidates should not be allowed to use a dictionary. They usually spend too much time looking up words and as a result may fail to complete their scripts or write an incoherent script because of the disruptions caused by looking up words frequently. Higher language proficiency learners may benefit in an examination if they know how to use a dictionary effectively (e.g. to check spelling, to see how a word is used in a sentence, to check the correct meaning of a word).

Teachers must emphasise the importance of script revision and practise it with their students. When they revise their scripts, students should focus on the variety of words, their relevance to the topic discussed, and their accuracy. They should only revise vocabulary after they have checked the script for content and organisation.
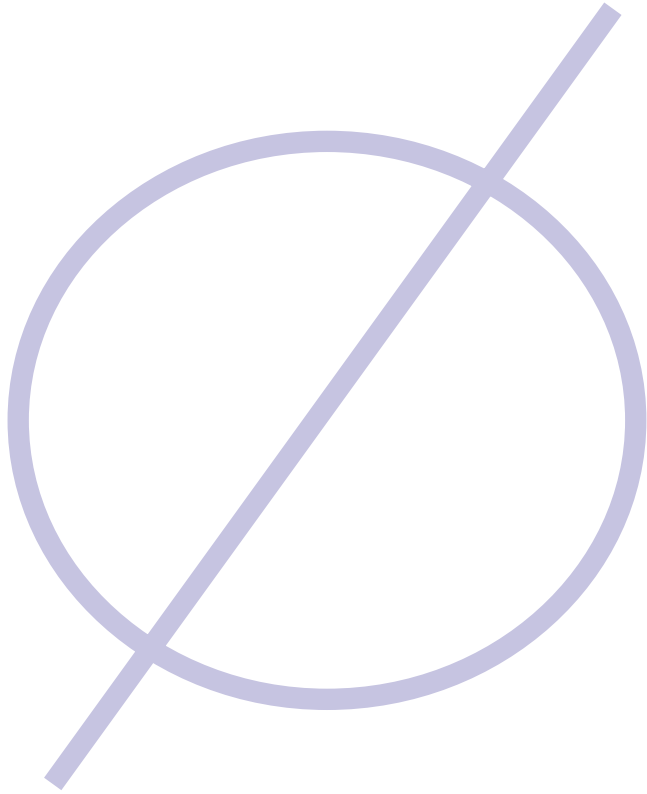
Closing comments

The reader who has read the chapters and completed the rating activities is now familiar with the Model writing examination and should be able to use with confidence the analytic scale developed by the Examination Reform Project. However, the Model examination was designed on the basis of the same principles that established international writing examinations have applied in designing their own tests. Therefore, by learning to use the analytic scale discussed in detail in this book, readers have indirectly developed skills that should allow them to be able to familiarise themselves with and apply other analytical rating scales.

Readers are encouraged to compare the scales designed by different testing centres and evaluate them on the basis of the information presented in this book. We hope that the detailed discussion of the rating process presented here will provide some help in the use of other rating scales.

In addition to the chapters on the nature of writing, the various text types, and the practical information for teachers and students, teachers are also encouraged to use in their classrooms the analytic scale presented and used for rating in the last part of the book. The scale is suitable for rating not only examination scripts, but scripts written by students in-class or at home. Admittedly, this type of rating is time-consuming, but it is worth the effort occasionally, especially when learners are preparing for a language examination.

A teacher using the analytic scale can provide much more detailed and informative feedback for his or her learners. An individual score on the four criteria included in the scale clearly indicates to the learners what their strengths and weaknesses in writing are. If their problems are revealed, they can address them with or without their teacher's help.

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APPENDICES

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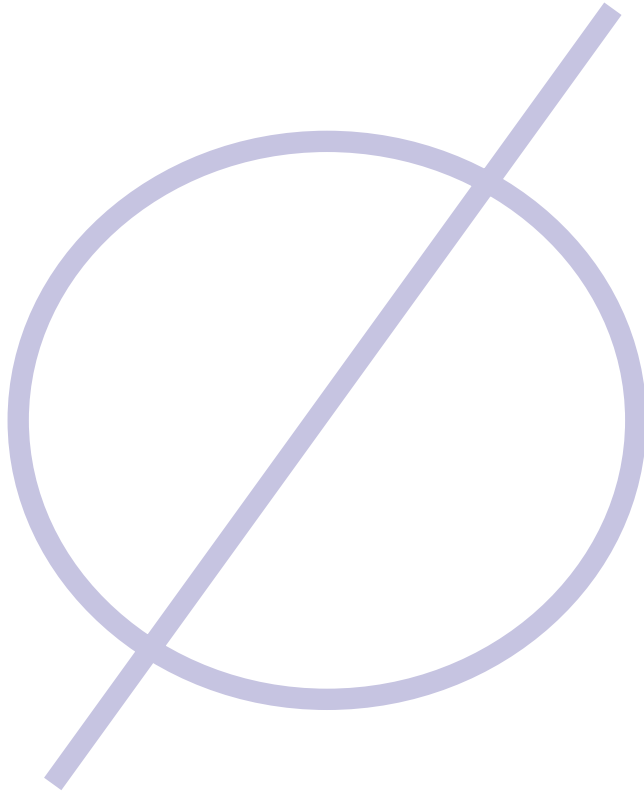
APPENDIX 1

Guidelines for Item Writers

Prompt Selection
- Use prompts that are clear. Consider using pictures / drawings as prompts, but ensure that they are black and white, photocopiable (in size max. A4) and appropriate for the age.
- Provide enough information in the input but not so much that the task becomes a reading task.
- Where possible, input texts should be authentic (e.g. advertisements, articles, leaflets, brochures, letters, etc.). Where this is not possible (e.g. personal notes, diary entries, etc.) make sure the text is written in correct and appropriate English.
- The language level of verbal prompts should be below the tested level.
- The input text (edited/simplified versions of authentic texts) is as short as possible. Ideally, it should not be longer than 50 words.

Task Selection
- The task should be realistic and plausible, and should be within the candidate's range of experience.
- Do not test the candidate's background knowledge of the world.
- Make sure that the task does not require creativity or imagination from students. You should provide appropriate prompts which determine what students should write, give enough information for them to write about, and can elicit the required amount of language.
- Make sure that if personal data or information is required, this should be provided in an input text or in other prompt(s) so as to standardise correct answers.
- Special care must be taken that the task does not turn into copying.

Task Design
- In order to make the task realistic and communicative, create a complete task environment: it should be clear for students to whom, why, when, where, about what and how they are supposed to write.
- The required length must conform to the Specifications.
- Edit each task on one A4 page, or two facing pages.
- Provide enough space to complete tasks. The space where students respond must be lined.
- If there is an authentic input text, edit its layout so that it resembles the original as closely as possible.

Rubrics
- Use standardised and simplified rubrics, well under the candidate's expected level.
- Avoid using exclamation marks and repetitions.
- Give all rubrics in English.
- Indicate the reason for writing, the audience and the required text type.
- Word rubrics so that they cannot be copied to complete the task.
- If students are required to write about several things, organise these requirements in bullet points (rather than list them in a continuous line) so that they are easier to follow.
- Indicate the required length in number of words.
- Indicate where to write answers.

APPENDIX 2

Glossary

The following glossary lists the most frequently used expressions in testing in general and in testing writing in particular.

analytic scale	A rating scale that makes possible the evaluation of a script on several (assessment) criteria of writing such as organisation, accuracy, or vocabulary. Descriptors are given for each criterion at different levels. Instead of a single score, the candidate receives a score for each criterion. *See also* **holistic scale, descriptors**
attitude marker	A word or phrase that shows the writers' attitude towards what they write (e.g. *well, obviously, frankly, personally*). Often confused with **discourse marker**.
band	The proficiency of a test taker defined with the help of a scale on the basis of test performance.
benchmark	Student scripts marked by a team of expert raters that illustrate points on a performance scale. Benchmarks are example or standard performances that the raters can refer to during the marking process.
blind double marking	In blind double marking, the second rater does not know the scores that the first rater awarded to a script. In 'non-blind' double marking, the first rater's marks are available to the second marker.
candidate	A test/examination taker.
cohesion	The term refers to grammatical and lexical relationships between the elements of the text, for example reference realised by personal/possessive pronouns, demonstratives and comparatives; substitution/ellipsis (the replacement of an item by a different one or by nothing); conjunction realised by conjunctions, adverbial connectors *(and, or, firstly, secondly, moreover, therefore, in conclusion);* or lexical repetition (same word, synonym/near synonym, general word).
coherence	A coherent paragraph contains sentences that are logically arranged and flow smoothly. When a paragraph is incoherent, the sentences are discontinuous and the reader finds it difficult to follow the text.
content points	The issues that should be covered by the candidate writing the task. Usually the number of points and their complexity will vary according to the level and the type of the task.
controlled composition	Writing in which the text to be produced is determined in various ways, e.g. by providing sentences to be combined or completed. *See also* **free composition, guided composition**
creative writing	Writing such texts as creative fiction and poetry or creative non-fiction.
descriptors	The statements that define the levels of the assessment criteria (in the case of the rating scale developed by the Hungarian Examination Reform Project for writing the assessment criteria are Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Grammar, and Vocabulary).
discourse marker	also *transition word/device, linking word* A word (or phrase) which shows the logical relation between ideas (e.g. *however* – contrast, *moreover* – addition, or *for instance* – illustration). *See also* **attitude marker**

discourse mode	also *rhetorical mode* The term refers to the way of writing about a topic. There are four basic rhetorical modes of discourse: description, narration, exposition, and argument. Exposition is an umbrella term that is used to refer to comparison and contrast, division and classification, cause and effect, problem and solution, process analysis, definition, analogy, and example and illustration.
double marking	The assessment procedure during which a candidate's performance is evaluated by two raters separately and then the two marks are compared. This is the usual way of assessing subjective written performance. There should be an agreement beforehand on what action to take in case of discrepancies between the raters. See also *blind double marking*
free composition	A composition in which the writer can write freely without little external control or limitation in the form of essay questions or set topics.
guided composition	A composition in which the writer is given more freedom than in the case of a controlled composition (e.g. the writer produces a paragraph from given information).
high stakes test	A test whose outcomes affect the candidate's future to a large extent. An in-class composition test, for instance, does not have such serious implications for the candidate's life as a school leaving examination or a university entrance examination.
holistic scale	A rating scale that makes possible the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of a script. Descriptors are given for each level, but instead of focusing on specific features of the script (e.g. organisation, accuracy, or vocabulary), raters evaluate general writing ability and award one score to the script on the basis of an overall impression.
input/output text	The *input text* or prompt is the verbal help provided by the test designer as an aid. The *output text* is the product expected from the candidate, the *script*.
inter-rater reliability	The degree of similarity between grades given by different examiners; whether two or more examiners will independently give the same marks to the same set of scripts using the same scale. *See also* **intra-rater reliability**
intra-rater reliability	An examiner has intra-rater reliability if on two different occasions he or she consistently gives the same marks to the same set of scripts. Some difference in the marks is allowed, but too much variation shows that the rater's judgements are not reliable. *See also* **inter-rater reliability**
objective test	In an objective test correct responses are given in the scoring keys that specify which items are acceptable, so markers are not required to make subjective judgements. Computers can mark objective tests. *See also* **subjective test**
off-/on-site marking	These terms define the venue of the actual marking. The former means marking individually in one's own time. The latter means a central procedure during which the assessors meet at an agreed time and go through the marking process together. *See also* **double marking**
organisation (of thoughts)	The discussion of the topic is opened in the introductory section, each developmental paragraph develops one main idea and these ideas follow each other logically. The discussion is closed in a concluding section.
pilot testing	also *pre-testing, trialling* A stage in the test development process that takes place before the test is administered in an actual examination. During pilot testing the examination is administered to a number of language learners to check whether it meets the necessary standards of quality and reliability.

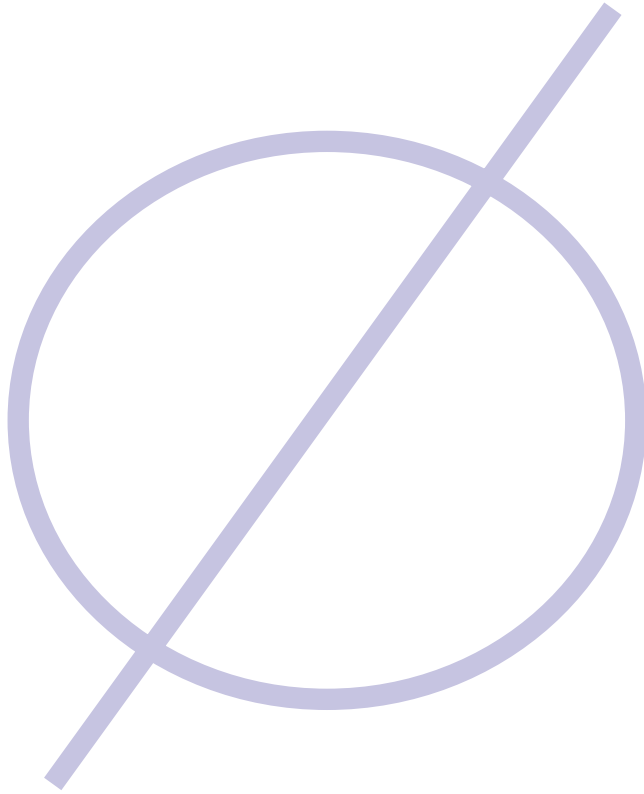|	
prompt	One or more sentences that provide the student with a situation or topic about which to write and the directions for the writing. It serves to stimulate a written response from the student.
range	Refers to the variety of grammatical structures or vocabulary items in a script.
rating scale	It is used for marking subjective tests of writing and speaking. The levels in the scale are usually indicated with numbers and are usually defined with descriptors.
register	Refers to the level of formality of a text (e.g. slang, colloquial, neutral, formal).
reliability	Refers to the consistency of the test scores over time. All things being equal, a candidate taking the same test on two different days should get the same scores.
rubric	The instructions to the candidates on the examination paper explaining how a test should be taken. It describes the organisation of the test, the time allocated to the tasks, provides instructions for the tasks and how candidates should respond to them. It can indicate the skill being assessed and can be in the target language or in the candidates' first language.
scale	Describes a series of increasing levels of language ability, usually with a description (descriptor) of the ability expected at each level. In the assessment of written performance allocation to a particular level is made by a rater who matches the performance elicited on a task with the descriptors of the scale. *See also* **descriptors**
script	The piece of writing produced by the candidate. *See also* **input/output text**
specifications	A description of the test format and design written for test developers and test users.
subjective test	In a subjective test there is no scoring key specifying correct or incorrect responses. Instead, candidates produce a range of more or less acceptable answers, and markers have to refer to a rating scale to assess how well candidates completed the task. *See also* **objective test**
task	What a candidate has to do according to the rubric. In the case of writing tasks, performance on the task is a complex, integrated activity, which is rated by humans using specially devised rating scales.
task achievement	How well the candidate has completed the task as outlined in the rubrics, by covering the necessary content points.
validity	Refers to the extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure.
washback	The effect of testing on instruction. Language test washback can be either positive or negative.

The glossary was compiled on the basis of:

Alderson, J. C., Clapham, C., Wall, D. (1995). *Language test construction and evaluation.* Cambridge: CUP.

Davies, A., Brown, A., Elder, C., Hill, K., Lumley, T., McNamara, T. (1999). *Dictionary of language testing.* Cambridge: CUP.

McNamara, T. (2000). *Language testing.* Oxford: OUP.

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Series Editor: J. Charles Alderson

Reading and Use of English

J. Charles Alderson
Mária Cseresznyés

This book will help students and teachers prepare for modern European examinations by developing, through a wide variety of English practice tasks, the skills needed not only to pass examinations, but also to use English in the real world. The authors review the process of reading, what skills and subskills are involved and how these can be tested. They also discuss modern approaches to the testing of grammar and vocabulary – the use of the language.

The practice tasks, based on authentic texts, were developed at different levels of The Common European Framework, in accordance with modern European testing principles and practice. All the tasks were tried out on large samples of real students in real secondary schools.

The reader will find the Answer Keys and the explanations especially useful.

INTO EUROPE

Series Editor: J. Charles Alderson

The Speaking Handbook

Ildikó Csépes
Györgyi Együd

This handbook provides an introduction to the assessment of speaking ability. It is aimed at those language teachers who need to learn how to design, administer or prepare students for tests of speaking ability.

The authors discuss what may influence test takers' oral performance, and describe how to design test tasks, including guidelines for designing interview questions, picture description tasks, role plays and discussion activities. They stress the importance of the roles of interlocutor and assessor in speaking assessments, and the Handbook presents a step-by-step description of the procedures that should be used in the training of interlocutors and assessors.

The Handbook is accompanied by a DVD that illustrates various speaking activities in different examination modes (individual vs. paired exams). In addition, it includes a selection of benchmarked performances representing different levels on the Common European Framework, which have been assessed by a group of experts. The experts' comments are included in the Handbook.

Language teachers who are required to design test tasks and administer speaking examinations will find the Handbook an indispensable guide to assessing EFL learners' oral language ability in both classroom and exam situations.

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Listening

Katalin Fehérváryné H.
Karmen Pižorn

This volume in the Into Europe series will help teachers and their students to improve their listening abilities in English, in order not only to prepare for modern European examinations but also to use English in real life.

The ability to understand people speaking in a foreign language is an essential skill in the modern world. Unlike more traditional tests, modern European examinations include listening tests which are based on 'authentic' texts recorded from real life. This volume presents a wide variety of different texts and listening tasks which reflect the sorts of things that learners may encounter on such tests.

The practice tasks it includes were developed in accordance with modern European testing practice by test writers trained in modern testing techniques. The book is accompanied by two CDs that contain the recordings of the listening texts.

Language teachers who have to test their students' listening abilities and those who wish to prepare their students for modern English examinations will both find this a valuable resource.

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