

B2 FIRST (FCE)

ESSAY WRITING GUIDE

A clear, practical guide for Writing Part 1

Structure | Planning | Useful language | Model answer | Examiner-style commentary | Practice task

Write clearly. Develop your ideas. Show the examiner what you can do.

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1. Know the task before you write

B2 First Writing Part 1 is compulsory, so every candidate needs a reliable essay-writing method.

Quick exam facts

Writing paper: 1 hour 20 minutes | Part 1: compulsory essay | Length: 140-190 words | Part 2: one task from a choice of three

In Part 1, you are given an essay question, two ideas linked to the topic, and an instruction to add a third, different idea of your own. Your job is to discuss the topic, give reasons and make your opinion clear.

A typical task:

In your English class, you have been discussing ways young people can reduce stress.

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

Notes:

1. doing exercise
2. spending time with friends
3. _____ (your own idea)

Before you write, identify the three content points:

1. Idea 1 - What will you say about it?
2. Idea 2 - What will you say about it?
3. Your own idea - Make sure it is different from the two prompts.

Remember

A strong essay answers the whole task. Beautiful vocabulary cannot rescue an answer that ignores one of the required ideas.

2. A reliable four-paragraph structure

There is no magic formula, but this structure is simple, balanced and easy to control in 140-190 words.

Paragraph 1 - Introduction

Introduce the topic and paraphrase the question. Keep it concise.

Paragraph 2 - First main idea

Discuss one given prompt. Explain why it matters and support it with a reason or example.

Paragraph 3 - Second prompt + own idea

Develop the second prompt and your own idea clearly. Avoid simply listing them.

Paragraph 4 - Conclusion

Bring the essay to a natural end and make your overall opinion clear.

What development looks like

Too thin: Exercise is good because it reduces stress.

Better: Regular exercise can reduce stress because it gives young people a break from academic pressure. For example, going for a run or playing a team sport can help them focus on the present rather than their worries.

Aim for balance

Do not spend 100 words on the first prompt and squeeze everything else into the final 50. Each required idea needs enough space to be understood.

3. Think like the examiner

Cambridge assesses B2 writing in four areas. Use them as your editing checklist.

Assessment area	Ask yourself
Content	Have you answered the task fully? Are all required ideas relevant and developed?
Communicative Achievement	Does your writing work as an essay? Is the tone appropriately neutral or formal and consistent?
Organisation	Are your ideas logically ordered? Are paragraphs clear? Do linking words and cohesive devices help the reader?
Language	Do you use a good range of vocabulary and grammar accurately? Are errors minor enough not to impede communication?

The key idea

You do not need "big words". At B2, controlled language, clear development and appropriate vocabulary are more valuable than impressive expressions used incorrectly.

A useful final check:

- ☐ Did I answer all three ideas?
- ☐ Is my opinion easy to identify?
- ☐ Does each paragraph have a clear job?
- ☐ Have I used linking expressions naturally?
- ☐ Have I checked grammar, spelling, articles and plurals?

4. Useful language for B2 essays

Learn flexible structures, not whole essays.

Introducing the topic	There are several reasons why ... It is often argued that ... Many people believe that ... One issue worth considering is ...
Adding and developing ideas	To begin with, ... In addition, ... Another important point is ... One significant advantage is ...
Giving examples	For example, ... For instance, ... A good example of this is ... This is especially true when ...
Contrasting ideas	However, ... On the other hand, ... Although ... While ...
Showing results	As a result, ... Therefore, ... This can lead to ... For this reason, ...
Concluding	In conclusion, ... To sum up, ... Overall, ... For these reasons, I believe that ...

Do not overuse linking words. An essay is not stronger because every sentence begins with Moreover, Furthermore or On the other hand. Use connectors when they express a real relationship between ideas.

Vocabulary tip

Collocations often make writing sound more natural: play a vital role, take into account, achieve a goal, gain experience, raise an issue, reach your potential.

5. Model B2 First essay

Read the answer once for meaning. Then read it again and notice how each paragraph performs a specific job.

Question: How can young people reduce stress?

Prompts: doing exercise | spending time with friends | your own idea

Nowadays, many young people experience stress due to academic pressure and busy lifestyles. There are different ways to deal with this problem, including doing exercise and spending time with friends.

On the one hand, exercise is an effective method of reducing stress. Physical activity releases endorphins, which improve mood and increase energy levels. For example, going for a run or attending a fitness class can help students forget about their worries and focus on the present moment. As a result, regular exercise can significantly improve both physical and mental health.

On the other hand, spending time with friends also plays an important role. Talking about problems with trusted people can provide emotional support and practical advice. In addition, social interaction prevents feelings of loneliness. Another useful way to reduce stress is practising relaxation techniques such as meditation, which helps individuals manage their thoughts more effectively.

In conclusion, although both exercise and socialising are beneficial, I believe that combining physical activity with strong friendships is the most effective way to reduce stress.

Word count: 171

6. Why the model works

Use the four assessment areas to understand what makes an answer effective.

Content

Both given prompts are discussed and the writer adds a clear third idea: relaxation techniques. The conclusion gives a clear overall view.

Communicative Achievement

The tone is neutral and appropriate for an essay. The ideas are presented objectively rather than conversationally.

Organisation

Each paragraph has a clear purpose. Linking expressions such as For example, As a result, On the other hand and In addition guide the reader.

Language

The answer uses natural B2 vocabulary and a mixture of simple and complex structures without forcing unnecessarily difficult language.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Writing fewer than 140 words or far beyond 190
- Forgetting one of the given prompts
- Failing to add a different idea of your own
- Giving an unclear or missing opinion
- Writing one long paragraph
- Using conversational expressions that do not suit an essay
- Memorising complete essays and adapting them badly
- Using complex grammar that you cannot control accurately

7. Plan, write, check

A short plan helps you avoid repetition, missing content and weak conclusions.

A five-minute planning frame

Question / topic	_____
Prompt 1 - main point	_____
Prompt 2 - main point	_____
Own idea - main point	_____
Overall opinion	_____

Practice task

In your English class, you have been discussing whether schools should teach more practical life skills.

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

Notes:

1. cooking
2. managing money
3. _____ (your own idea)

Write 140-190 words.

Before you start:

- ☐ Decide your third idea.
- ☐ Write one main point for each prompt.
- ☐ Choose your overall opinion.
- ☐ Plan four clear paragraphs.
- ☐ Leave time to check your work.

8. Final B2 First essay checklist

Use this before you finish every practice essay.

CONTENT

- ☐ I answered the exact question.
- ☐ I discussed both given prompts.
- ☐ I added a different idea of my own.
- ☐ My opinion is clear.

ORGANISATION

- ☐ I used clear paragraphs.
- ☐ My ideas follow a logical order.
- ☐ I used linking expressions naturally.
- ☐ I developed ideas instead of listing them.

LANGUAGE

- ☐ I used a range of vocabulary.
- ☐ I included some complex grammar I can control.
- ☐ I checked verb forms, articles and plurals.
- ☐ I checked spelling and punctuation.

EXAM CONTROL

- ☐ My answer is 140-190 words.
- ☐ My handwriting/typing is easy to read.
- ☐ I left time for a final check.

Keep practising

The aim is not to memorise one perfect essay. Practise the process: read the task, plan three ideas, organise them clearly, write in an appropriate style and check your language.

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Exam format and assessment criteria checked against the Cambridge English B2 First Handbook. September 2026.