

Cambridge First Writing Part 2 exam tactics discussion questions and tips

B2 First Writing Part 2 email or letter exam tactics discussion questions and tips

If you choose the FCE Writing Part Two email or letter task, how can you make sure that you do these things? (= What should your tactics be in the exam to ensure that you do these things?)

- Fully complete the task (= do everything that you are told to do)
- Organise the letter or email well
- Have consistent formality
- Minimise mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation
- Include high-level language
- Reach the word limit
- Finish in 40 minutes

What should you do when you first open the Writing paper?

What should you do after that, and in what order?

Put the stages that you are given into order. Some stages are not needed, and some could or should be done at the same time as each other.

Which things are unnecessary or even negative?

Which things are optional or depend?

Cards to photocopy and cut up/ Suggested answers

* = at the same time as the previous card

Underline words in the question
Decide on the level of formality
Plan your task by organising the things you need to write into two (or three) paragraphs
Write the opening greeting and the addressee's name (with the right level of formality)
Write an opening sentence or two
Write the body of the email or letter
Write a closing sentence or two
Write a closing greeting (with the right level of formality)
Write your name (with the right level of formality)
Add another sentence to the middle with a long arrow to reach the word limit
Read through your whole answer
Rewrite anything that might be difficult to read (e.g. because of messy handwriting)*
Change some things to more complex language, e.g. idioms in an informal email/ letter or longer words and phrases in a formal email/ letter*
Correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary errors*

Probably not needed

Add another sentence at the end to make the word limit
Add your own ideas, e.g. extra questions to ask the person who you are writing to
Brainstorm ideas
Count exactly how many words you have written
Write a long introductory paragraph, e.g. about the last time you met
Write addresses

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What should you first do when you turn to the Writing Part Two page?

What should you do after that, and in what order?

Which kind of task would you usually pick in Part Two? How would you decide which one to do?

What things about each type of task makes them easier and more difficult to complete?
Put your ideas into the table below.

Text type	Things that make it more difficult	Things which make it easier
Formal letter (e.g. job application or complaint)		
Informal letter		
Review		
Report		
Essay		
Article		

Put these into the categories above. Most fit in more than one place, and some don't fit anywhere because they aren't true.

- A strange genre which isn't common in real life
- Can change what you write to match the language you know
- Can choose the level of formality (as long as you then stick to it)
- Can have quite a boring title
- Can include almost anything as long as it matches the task
- Can use lots of topic-specific language
- Can use the same phrases in almost every task
- Doesn't matter how strange it is as long as it matches the task
- Need imagination
- Need lots of descriptive language such as adjectives
- Need to avoid idioms
- Needs a catchy title
- Needs a conclusion or summary
- Needs a variety of tenses
- Needs section headings
- Needs to catch and keep people's attention
- Organising into paragraphs is quite easy
- Paragraphing and formatting are very important
- Quite difficult to arrange into paragraphs
- Similar language to speech
- The facts must all be true
- There are common topics which you can prepare to write about
- There are common ways of organizing paragraphs which you can often use
- Very specific tasks that you have to match your writing very closely to

Which ones above do you think aren't true?

How can you use the advantages and decrease the disadvantages of each of the text types above?

What can you do outside class to improve your writing skills for the FCE exam?

Continue the discussion above, including these topics:

- Improving your editing skills
- Your weaknesses/ most common mistakes
- Reading
- Finding and learning typical phrases/ useful phrases
- Learning more advanced language
- Improving your ability to plan and organize
- Improving your ability to finish on time (e.g. stopping wasting time counting words and planning more quickly)

Choose a top five from this list:

- Do timed FCE Writing tasks (even when you can't have those answers marked)
- Give each other feedback on your writing

- Learn typical organisations (= paragraph plans) of formal letters etc
- Make a list of your previous or typical mistakes
- Read and analyse English-language reviews online
- Read and analyse FCE Writing model answers
- Read Cambridge's advice for students
- Read graded readers
- Use a self-study vocabulary book, e.g. an FCE one
- Write English-language reviews online

Suggested answers

Text type	Things that make it more difficult	Things which make it easier
Formal letter (e.g. apply for a job or complain)	Need long words and long phrases Need to avoid idioms The language you have to use is quite fixed Paragraphing and formatting are very important	Can use the same phrases in almost any answer The language you have to use is quite fixed Organising into paragraphs is quite fixed and easy There are common topics which you can prepare to write about There are common ways of organizing paragraphs which you can often use
Informal letter	Need to plan before you write Quite difficult to arrange into paragraphs	Language is quite similar to speech Can use some phrases in almost any answer
Review	Need to plan before you write	There are common topics which you can prepare to write about Can have a quite boring title (though a more interesting one is better) Can change what you write to match the language you know Can choose the level of formality? There are common ways of organizing paragraphs which you can often use Can use lots of topic-specific language
Report	Paragraphing and formatting are very important	Can have a quite boring title Can use some phrases in almost any answer Can change what you write to match the language you know Can choose the level of formality? There are common ways of organizing paragraphs which you can often use
Essay	A strange genre which isn't common in real life	Can use some phrases in almost any answer There are common ways of organizing paragraphs which you can often use
Article	A strange genre which isn't common in real life	