

If I can think it...

I can say it.

If I can say it...

I can write it.



INDEX

FIRST THING'S FIRST.....	01
BRAINSTORMING.....	05
COMMON PHRASES.....	08
OUTLINES.....	10
TRANSITIONAL PHRASES.....	15
PROFICIENCY BUILDERS.....	19
MORE PROFICIENCY BUILDERS.....	20
WRITING STYLES.....	23
OVERUSED WORDS.....	26
FIRST AND LAST IMPRESSIONS.....	28
HOW TO BEGIN YOUR COMPOSITION.....	29
WRITING THE BODY.....	31
WRITING CONCLUSIONS.....	33
SAMPLE TOPICS ECPE.....	35
SAMPLE TOPICS CPE.....	36
SAMPLE OUTLINES OF DESCRIPTIVE ESSAYS.....	38
SAMPLE ESSAYS.....	40
PROFICIENCY PUNCTUATION GUIDE.....	44
CAPITAL LETTERS.....	49

FIRST THING'S FIRST

So, what's the **first** thing you need to know about effective essay writing? Well, the **very first thing** to know is...

1. Effective Essay Writing - is like going on vacation...

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever gone on vacation and didn't know exactly where you were going before you set out on your trip?

Even if you wanted to maybe go to a place and then check around for a better price or somewhere closer to the beach or somewhere nicer, didn't you at least know where you would be staying when you first arrived?

Of course, the answer to both questions is... YES! So how is effective writing like going on vacation? **You need to know where you are going... before you begin!**

In other words, you have to have the conclusion in mind **before** you even write the first word! By having already decided where you want to go, it will help you get there more easily.

The concept; "effective writing is like going on vacation" is simply an adaptation to the well known reality that *people don't plan to fail, they fail to plan!*

What's important to remember? That the conclusion you come to answers what the question or rubric has asked for. If it does, then **whatever** it is needs to be supported by the evidence you've presented in the body of the composition. To put it differently, **what** you conclude is not as important as **how** you conclude your composition.

You will not be penalized if the examiner doesn't agree with your point of view as long as you've been able to support it with substantial evidence and viable examples.

I'll cover more on conclusions a little later and we'll take a look at some to show you exactly what I mean.

So what's the first thing you need to know about good, effective writing? That's right!

Effective Essay Writing - is like going on vacation... you need to know where you are going, before you begin.

Now, what's the **second** thing we need to know about effective writing?

2. Effective Essay Writing - is like good cooking...

Now you're probably wondering what on earth good writing and good cooking have in common, right? Allow me to ask you another question.

Have you ever had just plain boiled vegetables or potatoes?

You know - no salt, no pepper, no butter, no cheese, no sauce, no onions, and no garlic, nothing... just **nothing** to give your cooking a little flavor?

Exactly, you know that good cooking involves a little more than just boiling. It takes imagination. It takes **spices**. It takes salt and pepper and butter and cheese and sauces and spices and... you get the picture, right?

So good, effective writing is like good cooking because...

A little spice enhances the flavor!

That being said, we need to know what the "spices" of good writing are. You've probably guessed it by now, haven't you? The spices of good writing are **adjectives** and **adverbs**.

Adjectives and adverbs are to writing what spices are to cooking. Remember that without spices, our food would be extremely **bland**, or tasteless. Likewise, when we **overuse** spices we make our food **inedible** which means it's so bad that no one can eat it, right?

Well, the same holds true when we add flavor to our writing. The **overuse** of adjectives and adverbs make our writing unreadable. Not using, or **under** using adjectives and adverbs makes our writing bland.

We want our writing to have the flavor of our favorite food. Not too salty, not too watery, not too spicy, not too cold and not too hot.

In other words, we want it to be... **just right!**

We'll learn how to make our writing "just right" when we take a look at writing introductions.

For now, let's remember that the **second** thing we need to know about good, effective writing is...

That **Effective Essay Writing - is like good cooking...** we need to add some spice to enhance the flavor!

And now, what's **the third and final thing** we need to know about good, effective essay writing?

3. Effective Essay Writing - is as easy as 1, 2, 3...

Seriously. Good essay writing is as easy as 1, 2, 3...

Let me explain what I mean. When we write a composition or essay for our English language examination, our writing should include...

1. an introduction
2. a body
3. a conclusion

That's it. As easy as one, two, three...

Yes, there's a little more to it than just numbers, but the principle of good writing being as easy as 1, 2, 3, holds true. Now, let's take a closer look at this, shall we?

I always have my students make the following chart in their notebooks as I write on the board explaining the **"As Easy As"** 1, 2, 3, concept.

First I explain the above and tell them that good, effective writing is as easy as one, two, three. Then I tell them that one, two, three, **is really...**

3, 2, 1.

How's that, exactly?

Well, above notice that we have an introduction, a body and a conclusion, or, 1,2,3. Right? That's the order in which we **write** the essay.

1. Introduction	3. Conclusion
2. Body	2. Body (examples)
3. Conclusion	1. Introduction

The order in which we **plan** or **brainstorm** the essay, however, is 3, 2, 1.

The following quote tells me that this person knew a little bit about writing proficiently.

"The last thing one knows in constructing a work is what to put first." ~ Blaise Pascal

Remember what we said about good writing and going on vacation? Therefore, before we even write **one** word, we must **plan** where we are going!

The way we **plan** an essay is, 3, 2, 1.

By planning the conclusion first, we know where we are going. Next, we think of specific examples or arguments to use in the body that will support our **conclusion** and lead us to it. Finally, we come to the introduction, which means we are now ready to write our essay.

The great advantage of using this method is that when you get to the introduction you can begin writing. This **saves** valuable **time**!

Remember, some English examinations only allow **30 minutes** to accomplish the writing task. That doesn't leave much time for changing your mind half way through your composition.

Before we look at each section of our English composition separately, let's just quick review what we've learned so far about good, effective, essay writing.

1. Good essay writing is like **going on vacation**...
You need to know **where you are going**... before you begin!
2. Good essay writing is like **good cooking**...
You need to **add a little spice** to enhance the flavor!
3. Good essay writing is **as easy as... 1, 2, 3**... which is really 3, 2, 1

1. Introduction	3. Conclusion
2. Body	2. Body (examples)
3. Conclusion	1. Introduction

Now as we keep these three rules in mind, we're ready to look at each section of our essays. Bear in mind, however, that you already know the **three things** that you need to know about good, essay writing.

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming (no one likes to call it planning anymore, although that's exactly what it is) – is the most **crucial time** of your essay. Spend a few minutes effectively planning, and the rest of the essay literally writes itself.

Many people rush past this planning stage and jump right into the actual writing. This is a grave mistake. They fear they don't have any time to "waste" on planning. The fact is you don't have time to waste **NOT** planning your essay.

In other words, if you are only allowed thirty minutes for your examination, it is **not enough** time in case you have to start an essay over. You don't have time to "think of something better" when you are half way through your essay.

Remember the old adage:

→ **People don't plan to fail... they fail to plan**

Many times, especially during the planning stage of a composition. I've heard students remark that they didn't know anything about the particular topic presented in the writing task. In other words, they had **no idea** what to write about. If this happens to you too, don't worry, you'll soon know how to "fix" this problem.

To correct this problem, I tell my students to put on **different glasses** when looking at the topic. And if you're like them, you're wondering, what does that mean? Right?

Well, I think that we can look at a topic through different "lenses" so to speak and come up with a variety of things to say about the subject that we didn't know we knew. When we put on new glasses and look at the topic through other lenses we will find more than enough material to write. We will find more than we had ever imagined!

Try looking at the subject through the following lenses in the planning stage. Surely you will find something to write about if you consider your topic through one or more of the following lenses.

Social	Health	Economic	Environmental	Religious
Scientific	Historical	Geographical	Educational	Psychological
Personal	Ethical	Political	Moral	Philosophical

Of course, not all lenses are appropriate for every subject. Try on a couple and see how they fit in relation to your composition topic. Choose **one or two** perspectives (lenses) and continue.

After looking through different lenses start asking the "wh" questions. Who, what, where, when, why, how long, etc.

For example, if the subject of the composition was something like; "discuss the changing role of women in society," you probably wouldn't use the "environmental" lens to discuss the topic as it

really doesn't relate to the issue at hand. However, you **could** use the historical, social, economic, political, philosophical, traditional, religious and educational lenses to gather more than enough material to write your composition.

Then, as stated, start asking questions about the topic through a particular lens. **Who** are the socially, historically, religious, economically etc, important women of the last few years, decades, centuries?

What contribution did the socially, historically, religious, economically etc, important women of the last few years, decades, centuries do?

How has that changed? **Why**?

As you can see, by using this lens technique, you will be able to gather information about any given topic. The excuse of "I don't have anything to write about," or, "I don't know anything about the topic," has just been eliminated.

Aren't you glad?

As has been stated earlier, some exams allow only 30 minutes for their essay options. The most common essay types are discussed below. Many examinations give you a choice between exam topics and the type of writing you will have to do.

For example, some examinations (Michigan is one) allow you to chose either an **opinion essay**, a **for and against** essay, or a **problem solving** essay. While other examinations require you to write a formal letter or maybe even a report.

The best part about the methods discussed in this book is that they have a universal appeal to **all** essay writing. Regardless of the exam you are planning on taking, this material is helpful and appropriate.

Most essay topics on English examinations involve timely and modern issues. You will be required to analyze, comment, discuss, or offer solutions based on the relevant given topics.

The following are brief outlines for various essay types that are common on many English examinations. Included are some useful phrases to acquaint you with the various skills needed to write at the Proficiency level.

The "old school" method (meaning it's been around a long time because it's effective) still used for public speaking and/or effective essay writing is the following very good advice.

- ✖ First, **tell your readers** what they are going to read.
- ✖ Next, **let them read it**.
- ✖ Concluding, **remind them** of what they have just read.

Good essay writing takes more than just putting words on a paper (or a computer screen). It takes hard work and practice!

Though brief, what follows thoroughly covers the necessary information you will need to write an effective (i.e. **passing**) essay.

COMMON PHRASES

The phrases shown below are used to link sentences together and guide readers through an essay. They are **extremely important** because they act as road signs and let the reader know what is ahead, or rather, what to expect.

To get the most out of this book I recommend you briefly read through them and then get a newspaper, an old text book or even use the internet. Then, spend some time looking for these words and phrases in the material you have before you.

Use a pencil or pen to circle them. Make a small collection of articles and essays and make notes of how they are used by others. In so doing you'll help yourself to use them properly.

Small details are the difference between writing a passing composition or one that fails. Don't allow simple, CORRECTIBLE mistakes cheat you out of your success.

Linking Words and Phrases for Use in All Essay Types

Listing Points:

First of all, to begin / start with, secondly, thirdly, finally
For starters, next, after, then, to conclude

Introducing Examples:

For example, for instance, like, such as, in particular, this is clearly illustrated by, a typical or striking example of this is

To Explain sth to Your Reader:

This / which means that, in other words, meaning that, that is to say...

Showing Addition:

In addition (to), moreover, furthermore, apart from, besides, as well as, also both... and

Expressing Cause:

Because (of), due to, owing to, since, as, given (that)

Showing Result:

Thus, therefore, as a result / consequence, for this reason, consequently

Expressing Reality:

In fact, it is a fact that, actually, in practice

Emphasizing a Particular Point:

Clearly, obviously, it is obvious, needless to say, without doubt

Showing contrast:

Although, (even) though, while, whereas, despite, in spite of the fact that, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, yet, still + it may be argued / claimed that, others (many people) feel / claim / believe that...

OUTLINES

The following outlines show the basic form you should write that particular essay types in. After each outline are useful phrases that might accompany those particular essays.

I recommend using a variety of the phrases until you develop your own writing style. In so doing you won't fall into the trap of using the same phrases over and over.

OPINION ESSAYS - "agree or disagree"

Example: Smoking should be banned from all public buildings. Do you **agree or disagree** with the preceding statement?

Introduction

Introduce (restate) topic & **state your opinion**

Para 1-3

Viewpoints & justifications / **2-3 specific** examples that **support your opinion**

Para 3 or 4

Opposing viewpoint & justification / example

Conclusion

Summarize / **restate your opinion**

Remember that in an **opinion essay** you are expected to express **your** opinion.

In other words, you should be as **specific** as possible. The above outline is a useful guide as to what your essay should include and look like.

To help recognize opinion essays, you'll notice that the rubric often asks; "do you agree or disagree?"

The following points should be considered with regard to opinion essays. I often advise students to learn a few of them... **not** necessarily all of them. The point is; you should be able to use a **variety** so as to avoid repetition and overuse (i.e. I think, I think, I think.)

Giving Opinions:

In my opinion / view...
My opinion is that...
I feel / think / believe that...
I am inclined to believe that...
It seems / appears to me that...

I am (not) convinced that...
As far as I am concerned...
It holds that...
I hold / maintain that...

Useful Expressions for Agreeing Partially:

this is partly true
to (an) (certain) / (some) extent
in some cases

up to a point
While it can not be denied that
While it is true that

Useful Expressions to Introduce Arguments or Viewpoints:

One argument in favor of / against...is
It is widely believed / claimed that...
It can / could be argued that...
It is generally believed / maintained that
Some people believe / feel / maintain that...
Many people claim / maintain that...
Experts / Scientists support the view that...
Experts are / Scientists are / in favor of / against / opposed to

Useful Expressions for Concluding an Opinion Essay:

In conclusion,
To conclude,
All things considered,
Taking everything into account
For the above-mentioned reasons,
To sum up,
All in all,

I feel / believe that...
I am inclined to believe that...
I am convinced that...
It is my opinion / belief that...
I (don't) agree that...

FOR AND AGAINST ESSAYS = balanced essay – “discuss”

Example: Legal abortions are both a good and bad thing. **Discuss.**

Introduction

State topic (**without** stating your opinion)

Para 1-2

Arguments for - plus justifications / **1-2 specific examples**

Para 3-4

Arguments against - plus justifications / **1-2 specific examples**

Conclusion

Balanced conclusion / you may state opinion indirectly

Remember that **for and against** essays are **balanced** essays.

You should examine the subject from **both** a positive and negative side. The evidence you present for one side of the argument should be as compelling as the other. During the conclusion, and **only** during the conclusion, should you give an opinion albeit, indirectly.

Useful Expressions for Presenting Advantages:

The main / greatest advantage of...is

One / A (major) advantage of...is

Another / A further advantage of...is

One very convincing argument in favor...is

Supporters of claim / maintain /advocate that...

Useful Expressions for Presenting Disadvantages:

The main / greatest disadvantage of...is

One / A (major) disadvantage of...is

Another / A further disadvantage of...is

One very convincing argument against...is

Another negative aspect of...is

Proponents of...draw attention to the fact that...

Useful Expressions for Concluding a Balanced Essay:

In conclusion,	it seems appears that...
On balance,	it may be concluded that...
All things considered,	there is little doubt that...
Taking everything into account	it is likely / unlikely that...
To sum up,	it is clear / obvious / evident that...
To conclude,	the obvious conclusion to be drawn is...
All in all,	there is no absolute answer to

PROBLEM SOLVING ESSAYS – “what can be done”

Example: What can individuals and governments do about the rapidly increasing crime rate?

Introduction

Rephrase topic - state its causes and consequences

Para 1-3

Suggestions and expected results (**be specific**)

Conclusion

State **how and why** your suggestions will be effective

Problem solving essays allow you to express your creative self. The problems given in the rubric usually ask for **specific suggestions** and will require the development of your proposals to the reader. There are no “wrong” proposals as long as you support your proposals in a logical manner.

Useful Expressions to Suggest Solutions:

One possible way / useful suggestion to
Another / An alternative way / suggestion to this (the) problem

solve
overcome
combat
deal with

(of)...is/ would be

Steps should be taken in order to
Measures must be taken so as to

solve
overcome
combat
deal with

this (the) problem (of)...

If...happened / were to happen,

the result
the effect
the consequence

would be...

By _____, we / people / governments can ensure / can prevent...

The situation could / would improve if we / people / governments ...

It would be a good idea to _____ that way _____.

Presenting Expected Results:

The **result**
outcome
effect
consequence of this / -ing **would be...**
might be...

TRANSITIONAL PHRASES

Linking ideas, sentences and paragraphs

The following list of transitional phrases will prove useful in any, or all, of your writing assignments. Again, to really learn their usage, look at writing that is similar to what you will be expected to produce. Go through each text and make note of how the following words and phrases are used.

You'll be surprised to see that many of these little, seemingly unimportant words and phrases play such an **important role** in good, effective essay writing.

Learn to use some of the following in your essays. Pick those that you like or interest you or those that are similar to the transitional phrases you already use in your own language.

Learn a few of these and use them in your essays and you will be well on your way to **writing proficiently!**

Time Transitions

Meanwhile	At length
Immediately	Soon
After a few days / hours	In the mean-time
Afterwards	Later
After a few minutes	Not long after
Several days/hours later	At that moment
Ten minutes later/earlier	Just then
Earlier	Several centuries/day/hours before

Place and Location

Beyond	Here
Nearby	There
Opposite	Next to
On the opposite side	Adjacent to
Over head	To / on the right
To / on the left	In the center
Over to the left / right	On the West / East coast
In the same area	Four kilometers away
In the neighboring town	In the village next to mine

Actions

Suddenly	Entering the room...
All at once	Just then
At that moment	In ran / walked
Suddenly there came a noise...	Rising from his seat...

Emphasis

In particular
Usually
Especially of note

This is not always the case...
Although usually true, it is also certain
On one memorable occasion

Result

Hence
Therefore
Accordingly
Thereupon

Thus
Consequently
As a result
Then

Comparison

Similarly
Likewise
In like manner

The _____ is also _____
A similar method of _____ is _____
This area too has _____

Contrast

On the other hand
The _____ unlike the _____ is...
The _____ is quite different from the _____
On the contrary
After all
At the same time
Although true, it is also certain that _____
Despite the fact that
In spite of the fact that

But
Yet
And yet
Although
Otherwise
Still
Nevertheless
Despite
In spite of

Addition

Moreover
Further
Furthermore
Likewise
Also
Equally important
Finally

Besides
Again
In addition
Too
Often
First, secondly, thirdly, lastly
Besides

Purpose

Therefore
To this end

With this object in view / mind
For this purpose

Summary / Repetition / Exemplification

To sum up
On the whole
In short
In other words
To be sure
For example
Indeed
Certainly

In brief
Overall
In conclusion
As I have stated
As has been noted
For instance
In fact
In any event

Expressing Opinions

In my opinion
As far as I'm concerned
From my point of view
My viewpoint is
From where I stand I believe

It would appear that
I would seem that
It seems to me that
It appears to me that
I maintain that

Qualifying Statements

There is a tendency to
Usually, they are inclined to
Sometimes/Usually/Often/Generally things
appear to be
In most cases

A large number of the times
Generally speaking
On a few occasions
In a large number of cases
In some instances

Argumentative / Discursive

It has been said that
It can be claimed that
It can be argued / stated / held that
One of the main arguments in favor of
I would argue that
Given the choice it would be best if

It has been argued that
Some would agree that It is a fact that
It is undeniable that
There can be no doubt that
One main advantage / disadvantage is

Probability

It is virtually certain that
There is little likelihood
The main reason for doing that is

It is quite probable that
It is not inconceivable
The main aim of the research is

PROFICIENCY BUILDERS

With the above in mind, we are now ready to learn some basic writing techniques that are absolute “musts” at this level of essay writing. The following is based on observation and years of correcting student essays at this level.

It is my belief that if you learn to **correct these** all too common mistakes; you’ll do well in the written section of your exam.

The following structures not only need to be understood, *theoretically*, you need to **use** them when writing your essays on the examination. I use the term **proficiency builders** though you may know them by other names.

Connectors - when, while, until, as soon as, once

Connectors are used in the following manner. Note the verb tenses used after the connectors. These patterns are found at all levels of the language.

Time	Connector	Verb
You will see her (future)	when	she arrives. (present simple)
You can see her (present simple)	while	she is staying here. (present continuous)
Don't speak to her (negative imperative)	until	she has finished her work (present perfect)
You will understand (simple future)	when	you have been living here as long as I have (present perfect continuous)
You will be able to leave (simple future)	as soon as once	she gets here (present simple)
He will finish it (simple future)	once	he has found the time to do so (present perfect)

MORE PROFICIENCY BUILDERS

As with all languages, English has had certain patterns evolve in (or with) it over the centuries. The following are some of the more typical sentence patterns with examples to demonstrate.

As you write your essays bear these patterns in mind. They will help you go a long way to writing at the proficient level. What's more, you should be able to (need to) use a variety of these structures in your writing.

It is + adjective + that + subject + verb/word + clause

It is essential that you work hard if you want to pass your exams

It is necessary that I see her today.

It is important that she be on time for her appointment.

It is amazing that you should believe that.

It is recommended that you brush your teeth at least three times a day.

It is + adjective + infinitive + that + subject

It is astonishing to discover that she has never been out of her village.

It is terrifying to realize that we have enough weapons to kill everyone 19 times.

It is exciting to hear that they may have discovered a cure for cancer.

It is ridiculous to think that smoking doesn't harm you.

It is important to remember that exercise is a must.

Infinitives for Relative Clauses

The best thing (which you can do) is to wait for me here.

The best thing **to do** is to wait for me here.

The last man (who left the island) was the policeman.

The last man **to leave** the island was the policeman. (tense change)

Participles: Present and Perfect

I started to call out her name as I chased her

Starting to call out her name, I chased her. (present participle)

Having started to call out her name, I chased her. (perfect participle)

John turned on the light and walked into the room.

Turning on the light, John walked into the room. (present participle)

Having turned on the light, John walked into the room. (perfect participle)

Purpose Clauses:

so as not to

Action + **so as to** + result or purpose of action
so that + subject
in order to

He went to Michigan **in order to** buy an apple orchard.

He went to Michigan **so as to** buy an apple orchard

He went to Michigan **so that he could buy** an apple orchard.

He went to Michigan **so as not to miss out on buying** an apple orchard.
He went to Michigan **so that he could buy** an apple orchard.

Adjectival Phrases after Nouns

This is the school **attended** by the wealthy. (phrase begins with past part.)
This is a school **attending to the needs** of the wealthy (present part.)
This is a school **at which** the wealthy attend. (phrase begins with preposition)

Contrast and Concession Clauses

You may think that I dislike jazz **but** that is not true.
Although I appear to not like jazz, I really do.
In spite of the fact that I appear not to like jazz, I really do.
Despite the fact that I seem to not like jazz, I really do.
Despite seeming not to like jazz, I do.

Inversions and Negative Introductions – a must at this level!

Not only did they regard buying a house with a fireplace as important, **but** they considered it a necessity.
Only on rare occasions **did they** fight over politics.
Nowhere has there been a more difficult journey **than** to the South Pole.
On no account may you open your presents before Christmas morning!
“**No longer do** I smoke, thank you,” he said, as he turned down the cigarette.
Little did they know that the present was for them.

Reasons, Causes and Explanations – as, for, because, since

Because emphasizes the reason for doing something
I left the gathering *because* I was tired.
As causes the action to be emphasized
As I was tired, I left the gathering.
Since emphasizes the resulting action.
Since I was tired, I decided to leave the gathering.
For offers an explanation for the action
I left the gathering *for* I was extremely tired.

Gerunds as Subjects and Objects – acting as verbs or nouns

Examples

As a verb:

1. Can have an object: *Chasing* its tail, the dog fell over.
2. Followed by adverbs: *Chasing rapidly* after the cat, the dog fell over

As a noun:

1. Can be subject of the verb *Chasing its tail* is the dog's hobby.
2. Preceded by adjectives *Strenuous chasing* of the cat caused the dog to fall over.

The general rule for gerund use is as follows:

Gerund + Object + adverb of manner + adverb of place + adverb of time

Chasing the cat rapidly in the house at anytime is dangerous for the dog.

Reason and Result – It is _____ that _____

It is his lack of respect for her that causes me to dislike him.

It wasn't until he spoke that I recognized him.

I was only when I saw her face that I realized how upset she was.

While and Whereas – conjunctions used to contrast two or more things.

Note: Both while and whereas may be used at the beginning of a sentence or between two contrasting statements.

While reading a book may be fun, writing a book is much more of a challenge. Writing a book is more of a challenge **while** reading a book is much more fun.

Whereas I find her quite pleasant I consider him an obnoxious fool.

I consider her quite pleasant **whereas** I consider him an obnoxious fool.

Inverted Conditionals – last but certainly not least

To invert conditionals and add emphases do the following.

If + subject + verb, + clause

becomes

Verb + Subject + verb, clause

If John were to go, he would need to leave by four. Future / highly unlikely

Were John to go, he would need to leave by four.

If John should go, he would need to leave by four. Future / unlikely but possible

Should John go, he would....

If John had gone, he would have had to leave by four. Past / didn't happen

Had John gone, he would...

WRITING STYLES

In all writing there are do's and don'ts. For instance, you would probably use a different style when sending an e-mail to a friend than you would when writing a letter to apply for a management position at a bank, right?

Of course you would. If you didn't, you certainly wouldn't get the job at the bank. Writing to the bank and to your friend requires using the proper **style**. Likewise, in English examinations the style you use to answer your topic is important.

Remember that discursive essays are a **formal** piece of writing. This means that there are certain things you **should** AND **shouldn't** do.

DOs	DON'Ts
Use formal connectors consequently, in other words, furthermore	Use contractions don't believe, there aren't, it isn't
Use passive constructions it is believed / claimed to be / that	Use colloquial expressions I didn't catch/get the meaning
Use inversion Not until... did... / Not only... do...	Overuse simple vocabulary I think / very good / bad
Use advanced vocabulary informed decisions, debatable subject, tragic consequences	Overuse simple connectors and, but, also, because

When discussing style, it helps to have an understanding of the various terms and figures used. Whether you know what they are called or not, you should be able to use most of them at this level of writing. The most common writing style terminology follows with appropriate examples.

Another self assignment might be to see how many of these you can identify in today's newspaper.

Synonym:

Same meaning. Words that may be substituted for another word are known as synonyms.

e.g. disappeared = vanished

Antonym:

Opposite meaning. A word directly opposite of the word used is an antonym.

e.g. disappeared = appeared

Metaphor:

A type of comparison taking the point of one object, person or quality and comparing it to another, usually inanimate, object.

e.g. The dog is man's best friend.

Literally speaking, a dog is not a friend, but a pet.

e.g. The camel is the ship of the desert.

Literally speaking a camel is not a ship but acts like one in the desert.

e.g. The old battle-axe wore a long black dress.

The women wearing the black dress was not really a battle-axe, but you wouldn't want to be unfriendly to her!

Simile:

Comparisons using "like" or "as." We use it to compare people or objects with objects they share something in common.

e.g. She was tall as a tree and her voice was like an ambulance siren.

Picture an extremely tall woman with a high- pitched, disturbing voice.

Antithesis:

The contrast or opposites of **ideas**. Notice that antonym is a single word whereas antithesis describes an idea.

e.g. Courage is considered an admirable quality while cowardice is deemed despicable.

e.g. The descent into evil is easy whereas the ascent to virtue more difficult.

Personification:

The giving of inanimate or lifeless objects the qualities of living things.

e.g. Poverty is a cruel master. e.g. *Worry had carved trenches in his face.*

Alliteration:

The repetition of same sounds or letters at the beginning of words in a sentence.

e.g. Peter piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

Inversion:

The changing of the normal order of words to add emphasis.

e.g. To dig I am unable, to beg I am ashamed.

The normal wording of the previous sentence would be: *I am not able to dig and I am ashamed to beg.*

By using inversion the writer achieves a more dramatic affect.

Euphemism:

The use of more pleasant sounding terms for unpleasant or difficult situations. Nowadays, this is used extensively by the "PC" (politically correct) crowd.

e.g. She passed on = she died

e.g. People with special abilities = physically disabled

Metonymy:

The using of something connected to someone or something else to stand for that thing.

e.g. She sets a good table - meaning she provides her guests with good food.

(Similarly, we often refer to judges as, 'the Bench.')

Paradox:

Making statements that are valid sound contradictory.

e.g. The more you hurry, the slower you go.

This appears to be a contradiction but if you look at it more closely you see it is a warning against making foolish mistakes and therefore spending more time than necessary on a task otherwise hurried.

Periphrasis:

Saying something - with other words - in a roundabout way.

e.g. An agricultural implement for breaking and turning over sod; is a periphrasis that describes what is otherwise known as "a spade."

Irony:

Concealing real or intended meaning in other words.

e.g. "My, aren't you in a sunny mood today."

The speaker is most probably speaking to someone who is a very **foul**, or bad, mood.

Illustration:

Giving examples or proof for comments or statements in your essays.

In other words you *illustrate* your argument by given appropriate examples.

Contrast:

Use opposites to vary your writing. Opposites give your reader the largest degree of contrast and make for good impressions.

Humor:

Irony, satire, parody and even sarcasm can be used in writing to enhance it. **Be careful!** For most exam settings humor may be inappropriate. Moreover, when dealing with an international audience, your intended laugh may cause offense.

OVERUSED WORDS!

At first glance, this may not seem important; however, think of the person grading your essay. He/she will have been reading many other essays on the same subject by the time they get to yours. What's more, they will have been reading similar suggestions and mistakes from most of the examinees.

Wouldn't it be good to separate yourself with just a few well placed substitutes of often overused words?

Of course it would! And at this level of the English language, every little bit helps, right?

Therefore, learn to replace words that are *overused* - words like: very, important, negative, understand, good, believe, dangerous, etc., with appropriate words from one of the following lists.

NEGATIVE	GOOD	IMPORTANT	VERY	UNDERSTAND	DANGEROUS	BELIEVE
adverse	positive	essential	highly	comprehend	alarming	hold
opposing	satisfactory	crucial	exceedingly	grasp	risky	contend
disruptive	acceptable	imperative	severely	perceive	hazardous	think
contrary	excellent	vital	immensely	realize	critical	maintain
bad	valuable	significant	utterly	recognize	serious	claim
unfavorable	beneficial		extremely	enlightened	perilous	argue
			excessively			

Let's use the following example to illustrate the overuse of words more clearly, shall we? The underlined words are typically **overused** by students writing language examinations.

Using drugs is dangerous. There has been a very big increase in the use of drugs nowadays and I believe it is very negative for society. It is important that governments help those who seem to be unable to help themselves. We must understand that the people who use drugs need our help.

There is nothing wrong with the above paragraph per se; but compare it to what follows and see the difference only a few words can make.

Using drugs is a perilous proposition. There has been an exceedingly large increase in the use of drugs nowadays and I contend that it is extremely hazardous for society as a whole. It is vital that governments help those who seem to be unable to help

themselves. We must recognize the need that the people who use drugs need our help.

By eliminating the overuse of certain words, we go a long way in making our writing more proficient. Moreover, we begin to separate our work from the work of others writing the same exams.

Remember, a **point or two** is the difference between pass or fail for most test takers. Those that fail to receive a passing grade usually do so by the *slightest* of margins. Likewise, those who *do* receive passing marks may do so by no more than a point or two.

Give yourself the best opportunity to pass by using this very simple, yet **effective**, (there's that word again) writing method. Learn and use the above words to your advantage.

It's time now to go back to your newspapers and old test books to look at the way others write essays and see how they implement (don't overuse **use**) the words in the above lists.

I bet you'll be surprised to find that what you thought to be good writing contained mostly words from the lists and not the overused words in bold above. Go ahead, check it out for yourself.

FIRST AND LAST IMPRESSIONS

OK. Let's say we've finished the planning stage and we are about to begin the actual writing of our composition. Remember, we've read that effective writing is like good cooking and we've learned that good cooking needs some spice if we want our dish to be tasty.

The same goes for our writing.

We only get **one chance** to make an impression on our reader so it's important to do all we can to make a good first impression. The opening paragraph can make or break a composition in my opinion.

The art of editing your own work while writing can be learnt.

If the opening paragraph states an obvious lie, exaggerates, confuses or doesn't tell me why I'm reading this particular composition, I'm **not** likely going to continue to read it, am I?

So, apart from **not** doing any of the previous, how do we actually begin writing? I'm glad you finally asked!

The following provides us with part of the answer. Note that the following are only meant to be examples. They are in no way exhaustive. What I hope to accomplish in this section of the book is to introduce you, the reader, to a few techniques that have been used successfully by other students writing English language exams.

Make no mistake. **You** will have to **write** and **apply** these techniques in order for you to improve your writing at this level of the language.

Writing is **not** theory. It can't be learned from only *reading* a book. It requires practice. It requires you to make mistakes and to learn from them. It takes perseverance. But more than anything else, it takes you actually sitting down with pen and paper (or keyboard) in hand, and writing the words.

HOW TO BEGIN YOUR COMPOSITION OR, TECHNIQUES TO GET THE JUICES FLOWING...

Any **one** (or combination) of the techniques outlined below can be used in starting your compositions. All of the examples that follow are based on the following composition topic.

"Describe how you imagine yourself in twenty years' time."

1. Factual Statement - showing what your composition is all about.

Example: I imagine that in twenty years time, I shall be quite different from what I am now. I hope that I shall not only be twenty years older, but twenty years wiser as well!

Note: Factual Statements can be boring as compositions starters, but at least they start you off and are fairly easy to write.

2. Relevant Action to Your Theme

Example: I glanced in the mirror this morning when I was washing my face and suddenly it occurred to me that I was growing older and that this face which stares back at me now will be quite different in twenty years. I began to wonder just how my life, as well as my face and body would have changed in twenty years' time.

3. Relevant Dialogue to Your Theme

Example: "How do you imagine you will be, and what do you think you will be doing in twenty years' time?" Mary asked me. The question startled me because up until that very moment I had never given the future much thought, let alone twenty years into the future. Here I was, one week from graduation, and faced with the concept of what my life would be like when I reached my father's age.

4. Relevant Anecdote or Story.

Example: I couldn't help staring at the old man as he walked into the store. He stood wearily against the counter as he placed his order. The odor that soon greeted me said that he already had had enough, but sure as rain, he wanted more. He must have seen the surprised look on my face as he somewhat hissed; "just wait 'till you're my age, we'll see how you turn out." It was then, for the first time ever, I thought about what my life would be like in twenty years time.

5. Rhetorical Questions

Example: What shall I be like twenty years from now? I imagine that I... **etc.**

6. Proverbs or Quotations

Example: "Youth is wasted on the young." This statement can be interpreted both metaphorically and literally, and doubtless, whichever way it is interpreted, it is true. I wonder, however, what I shall be like when I am not young; say, twenty years' from now. What will my life be like then? What will I have achieved and done in the next twenty years?

WRITING THE BODY

Writing the body of your essay shouldn't pose any great difficulties. Do you want to know why? Because, we've planned out our composition before we began to write so the information we want to share here in the body should be the information we thought of in the beginning when we did our brainstorming.

In other words, there shouldn't be any surprises in the body of our compositions. Troubles tend to arise for those who write whatever comes to mind and then halfway through their essay something else comes to mind and they want to start over.

As has been previously stated, this is not a good idea. You simply don't have the time for "false starts."

So let's consider how to write the body of the sample essay; "*Describe how you imagine yourself in twenty years' time.*"

For starters, in the planning stage I would have thought of 2-4 **specific** examples that I would want to include in my composition.

One way to think of and include specific examples is from our own lives or surroundings. For example, my Father is a little more than twenty years older than I am. So I can imagine my life being similar to his (at present) in twenty years time. Not only do I get a point of reference from which I can use a specific example, I get an idea about what things might be included in my life in the future time frame.

Likewise, I have a point of reference as to what life will **NOT** be like. So now I have 2 specific examples that I can include in the body of my composition - just from my own family or close surroundings.

What if I expand my search for specific examples to people that are not in my immediate family? Let's say I start to look at teachers, parents of my friends, neighbors, business acquaintances etc. You can see that I'll have no problem finding material for specific examples to include in my essay.

So, let's begin to write the body of the essay including 2-4 specific examples that will help lead to my conclusion. Remember, the conclusion is that which we think of first but simply write last.

As I often tell my students at this point of the essay writing process, when we know where we want to go, (the conclusion) all we have to do is draw the map to get there. The body **is the map** that will take us to the conclusion.

Let's say I started my essay with the proverb (number 6) from above.

"Youth is wasted on the young." This statement can be interpreted both metaphorically and literally, and doubtless, whichever way it is interpreted, it is true. I wonder,

however, what I shall be like when I am not young; say, twenty years' from now. What will my life be like then? What will I have achieved and done in the next twenty years?

The body would begin to look something like this:

To answer the preceding questions I need look no further than my father. You see, my father is nearly twenty years older than I am so I imagine my life will be similar to the life he has right now. He is very involved in coaching football and active with his children's activities. So, I imagine that I will have a family and hope to have the time available to be as active in their lives as my father has been in mine. What's more, I'll be half way to retirement age and that means I'll need to start planning for my retirement. Like my father, I'll probably be sitting at the dining room table with a bunch of papers spread out all over. I may be worrying about having enough money for my retirement if my father's life now is any indication of the way my life will be in twenty years' time.

Make your examples as **specific** as you possibly can. The more specific the better. By adding the appropriate detail to your writing you can do much to improve it. Too often essays are **too** general. It seems students think that lots of "blah, blah," is good in an essay, whereas it is not.

Now, if I were to continue the body of this composition I would include my accomplishments professionally by perhaps comparing them to a friend's father who recently received a big promotion. In that way I could avoid making this a composition comparing my father and myself.

This point can not be stressed enough! So I'll say it one more time. **Make sure you answer the rubric!** Read it time and time again and read it while you are writing your essay to be sure you truly are answering it. There is no excuse for losing valuable points or receiving a failing grade simply because you failed to answer the question that was asked.

Even writing well (grammatically speaking) does not save a composition that doesn't answer the rubric.

Allow the body of your test to flow into your conclusion. Follow your map. Remember, what you are essentially doing is making a plan, writing the plan and reminding people of the plan you wrote. That's it.

WRITING CONCLUSIONS

OR, AS THE PROPHET SAID; LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER...

Now, how do we conclude our essay? Well, since we've planned our conclusion first, we only have to follow our plan to reach the conclusion. What's more, since we thought of our conclusion first, we've written the whole essay leading to it, so our conclusion should be the **easiest** part of our composition to write.

In the conclusion, we need to accomplish **two** basic things. **One**, wrap things up nice and neatly and tie up any loose ends and.... **Two**, leave our reader with a little something to think about. If we accomplish those two things, we've probably written an effective essay.

Many times I counsel my students to finish in a manner similar to the way they started. In other words, if you started your essay with a rhetorical question; why not finish your composition with one as well?

Do you see how a question can leave the reader answering it in their mind? This is quite a common and **effective** approach to ending an essay.

Other techniques include:

1. Summation - summarize all of your arguments

Example: So that's how I imagine my life to be in twenty years' time. I shall have established my career and be on the move up in the corporation. I'll have 2.3 children and live in a big house in the suburbs with an even bigger mortgage. And I'll be well on my way for making plans for the rest of my life.

2. Future Finish - looking ahead to a given time in the future

Example: If everything goes according to plan, I'll be sitting on a beach enjoying the royalties from my investments in a state of retired bliss. And if they don't go according to plan, I'll be slaving away at my job like so many other people my age. Either way, I'll have developed new goals and will be in hot pursuit of fulfilling those twenty years from now.

3. Finish with a Relevant Climax

Example: Wife, house, children – the whole enchilada as they say. This is the situation I'll be in twenty years from now.

4. Sentence of Finality

Example: This, then, is the stage of life I will have reached twenty years from the present.

5. Rhetorical Questions

Example: Who can really say what fate has in store for them? That is the question, isn't it? What will my life be like twenty years from now?

6. Quotation or Proverbs

Example: In the end I can only leave the future up to my future. As it says in the Bible, "take no thought for tomorrow for tomorrow will take thought for itself. Sufficient unto the day, is the evil thereof."

The preceding examples show ways in which you can write **introductions, the body** and **conclusions** to your written work. Make sure, no matter the techniques you use, to practice them. As has been previously stated; good, effective writing doesn't happen overnight.

There is simply nothing that can replace practice when it comes to something as complex as writing - especially when it's in a foreign language. So, ask your teacher to help you by thoroughly correcting your mistakes and giving you the proper guidance to help you improve your writing.

The written sections of most English examinations are difficult to many students simply because they don't practice enough. After all, we read nearly every day but how often are we actually required to write formal letters or reports in our everyday lives?

The answer is, not too often, right?

Keeping this in mind, you would be wise to get as much writing practice as possible before actually sitting for your examinations.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The following pages contain composition topics for a variety of English language exams. Many are **actual exam topics** from previous academic years.

ECPE

You have **30 minutes** to complete **one** of two topics

Every year consumers are injured using products (food, cosmetics, appliances) that seem to be safe but aren't. Who should be responsible for making sure that products are safe to use: the consumer, the producer, the government, or someone else? Discuss providing support of your point of view.

Most people believe that laws exist to protect people and should not be broken. Nevertheless, some people may break the law at some time for what they think are good reasons. Describe a situation that you think breaking the law is justified.

Changes in the political organization of various countries in Eastern Europe have had an impact on surrounding countries. Discuss how these changes have affected your country or local community. Limit your discussion in a single economic, political or social issue.

Society is in great need of organs to be transplanted to people who might die otherwise. What do you think of organs donor and what should we do to sensitize many people to do this.

Your grandmother left you in her will 4 things to choose from:

- a. an old family photograph in a beautiful frame
- b. something written by her (a diary or a book)
- c. material goods like a car or jewelry
- d. money

Explain why you would choose one of the four.

Some very successful professional performers (singers, actors, athletes, dancers) continue to work after their skills begin to decline, even though they don't need more money. Why do you think they continue working while others stop early, when they are still at the pick? Give reasons for your point of view.

Many universities have distance learning programs, which allow students to take classes at home via TV or the Internet rather than attend classes at some capital location. What impact, if any, has distance learning had in your country? Discuss providing examples.

Discuss public art (paintings, statues, monuments) and the qualities that make it good or bad. Controversy on what designs are chosen for display. Explain and give examples.

Does success depend on who you know or what you know? What makes a person successful? Knowing important people and having the right connections, or having knowledge and expertise? Discuss and give examples.

There have been many advances in medicine over the past century. Write ONE such invention / procedure / drug that you believe has been especially significant. What effects (positive and/or negative) has it had in society? Give examples.

Researches agree that watching TV affects children behavior. If you were a parent what limits, if any, would you place on your children's TV watching? Give examples.

CPE

You have 2 hours to write **two essays**. Each should be about **350 words**.

Briefly describe the way in which you were brought up and then how you would bring up your own children.

“Travel should broaden the mind and lead to better understanding, but it often fails to do so.” Discuss.

Write a short story beginning or ending with the words: She took the framed photo from the drawer and, with a smile, placed it carefully on the desk.

A new company is producing a visitor’s information guide and, as the local tourist officer, you have been asked to write a report on two contrasting eating places which you would recommend. You should cover such points as location, atmosphere, quality of food and service.

Being visited by relatives can be a difficult experience. Describe some such situations and how best they might be dealt with.

Is tourism in the world today beneficial or harmful?

Write a short story beginning with the words: As soon as I put down the phone, I realized I had made a mistake.

As secretary of a local group which is concerned with the conservation and improvement of the environment, write a report for the next annual general meeting. You should include details of membership, recent successes and any proposals already submitted for further action.

Describe a person whom you have known well for a long time, showing how perception of that person has changed with the passing of the time.

“The growth in the world’s population is probably the biggest problem facing mankind today.” Discuss this statement and offer some possible solutions to this problem.

Write a story beginning with the words; “the last time I did that was when....”

Write a letter to your superior asking permission to be excused from work to take part in an important family occasion. You should give details of the event and indicate how your work can be re-organized during your absence. (About 300 words)

Describe in about 350 words, either (i) a doctor’s waiting room, or (ii) a visit to the dentist.

‘Education is not only for the young’. Discuss.

Write a story entitled ‘An unwelcome visitor’.

Would you rather live in the country or in the city? Describe the advantages and disadvantages of both.

Without a moral compass, humankind is doomed to failure. Discuss.

SAMPLE OUTLINES OF DESCRIPTIVE ESSAYS

Descriptive Essays – You may run into a descriptive essay or two when writing your English language exam. What follows are outlines including a couple of sample descriptive essays. At this level you probably won't be asked to describe a person, but you may have to describe a process or even a special event taking place.

Describing People

Introduction

Who the person is / when and how you first met

Para 1

Describe their appearance (be specific)

Para 2

Describe their personality (include examples)

Para 3

Describe their lifestyle / beliefs

Para 4-5

Explain why you chose to describe them

Give justification

Conclusion

Comments / feelings about the person

Describing Places

Introduction

Name plus location of place

Explain why you chose it

Para 1-2

Describe the place and its surroundings, facilities, activities that can be done there.

Describe the building: surroundings with detailed description include interesting details

Para 3-4*

Explain why the place is special – give justification

Conclusion

Comments / feelings about the place plus your recommendation

Describing Objects

Introduction

What the object and its function is

Para 1

Detailed description of appearance and what it is made of

Para 2

Detailed description of its use

Para 3-4*

Explain why it is special

Give justification

Conclusion

Comments / feeling about the object

Any recommendations?

Describing Events

Introduction

What the event is plus when / where it is held

Para 1

Describe the preparations
Anything special about them?

Para 2

Describe the actual event

Para 3-4*

Explain why you chose this event

Give justification

Conclusion

Comments / feelings about the event / recommendation

Describing a Process

Introduction

What the process is plus when / where it happens

Para 1

Describe the preparations

Para 2

Describe the actual event

Para 3-4*

Explain why you chose it - give justification

Conclusion

Comments / feelings about the event plus your recommendation

SAMPLE ESSAYS

The following essays are all original. They have been graciously supplied by students. The corrections and comments are easily visible. I have assigned applicable scores so you can have an idea of how your essays match up.

Description of a Process - Sample

Preparing Grilled Lamb Chops

If you haven't ever tried them, you'd be hard pressed to find a more delicious item for your outdoor grill than delicious, lamb chops. By following the simple steps outlined below you too can enjoy the great taste of the most excellent of all grilled meats.

First, chose lamb chops from a reputable butcher. Tell them exactly how you want them cut (thick is best) and be sure to let them know that they are for the grill. In this way, you will be certain to get meat that can take the heat of the grill without shrivelling away to nothing but a bunch of charred bones. You should figure on about a pound of meat for each average adult.

Next, make a marinade to soak the meat in before you grill them. Figure anywhere from 8 to 24 hours for the meat to marinade (the longer the better). To make the marinade combine a table spoon of dried mustard powder with a table spoon each of salt and pepper in a small bowl. (this is the dry mixture) Then, combine the juice of three whole lemons with a cup or more (depending on the amount of meat) of white wine and a few sprinkles of wine vinegar. (this is the wet mixture)

After the marinade mixtures are prepared, place the meat side by side in a large flat pan. Next, pour the wet mixture over the meat so that the bottom of the pan is covered and making sure that most of the meat is covered as well. Once the meat is covered with the wet mixture let it set for a few hours. After a period of time, flip the meat over and cover the meat with the dry mixture. Squeeze a lemon over the top of the meat to cause the dry mixture to stick to the meat.

While the meat is marinating start the grill by setting fire to the charcoal briquettes. When the briquettes near readiness (they should be nearly white with little or no visible flames) place the grate of the grill over the flames so that it can become hot (after it has been cleaned from the last cook out).

Finally, place the meat onto the grate over the fire. The meat should be turned a few times to prevent its burning and is ready when the meat is cooked fully through without signs of excess burning. Serve with potatoes and salad and maybe a good wine or an ice cold beer. Once you take your first bite you'll definitely join the "I love grilled lamb chops club".

[The above is an excellent essay. There are no real mistakes. The level of English used is that of a native speaker. Good connectors and advanced structures.]

Grades: Ielts 9, ECPE high pass, CPE pass, Toefl definitely high pass. This essay would not be applicable for the GMAT or GRE.

TOPIC FOR IELTS / CPE / TOEFL / ECPE

The number of fast food restaurants has increased rapidly over the last few years. Some people are very anxious about this increase. What is your opinion of fast food restaurants and their effects on the population? Give reasons and/or examples to support your answer.

The increased number of fast food restaurants in our cities is a sign that working people tend to prefer more and more convenience food to a full meal. This new unhealthy diet, however, combined with a little movement and a total of bad habits, effects our life in more than one aspect[s].

To begin with, junk food is not only is unhealthy, but it is fattening too. As our diet is getting worse and worse, obesity has become a serious problem even for young people. Children find it especially hard to resist to the wide variety of attractive choices, [sp] which a place like a fast food restaurant advertises.

In addition to obesity, there are several health problems directly linked to what we eat. High blood pressure, cholesterol and heart attacks are a big threat for people around fifty who have abandoned the traditional home-made meal. Moreover, the quantity and quality of those fast food meals offer is too low for their price per portion. Consumers end up to pay paying too much for the friendly environment, the smartly-designed packages and a meal poor in vitamins.

It can also be argued that when people choose quick snacks to home cooked food, this can be bad for the whole family.

Traditional meals, where the members of the family are gathered to talk, communicate and discuss their problems, have been replaced by a lonely meal in front of a plastic packet.

To sum up, eating fast food must be concerned considered as a major temptation which we should try to avoid. Even if it seems to be the only solution to the problem of the little time we all have, we should always think that we are what we eat and at least try to make the less least harmful choices. So next time, we could prefer a homemade sandwich or a salad to a hamburger, a fruit juice to a cake and to cook for our friends rather than to call for a pizza. Then it won't be so harmful if we occasionally consume a fast meal when it is really a necessity for our modern way of living.

[words or letters not needed that were in the text]

[words or letters added to correct the meaning of the text]

[sp] = wrong spelling [syn] = wrong syntax

Comments – overall ok. A few syntax problems that don't really interfere with the understanding. Wrong words and weak conclusion.

Grades = Ielts 5.5 or 6, ECPE borderline/ low pass, CPE fail / borderline pass TOEFL low pass

TOPIC FOR IELTS / CPE / ECPE / TOEFL

If you had the choice, which would you choose – a high-paying job that meant working long hours and would give you little time with your family and friends, or a lower-paying job with shorter hours that would give you more time with family and friends? Explain your choice.

Nowadays, expenses have been raised [syn] rapidly. People had [ts] to do two jobs so [as] to fulfil [sp] one's obligation. But this has as a consequence to spent [ts] lots of hours away from their homes.

In my opinion, I would choose a lower-paying job so as that to have more time with my family and my friends. Because money can't buy happiness or good health. I know that this decision has and both positives and negatives effects.

One positive effect is that you can stay more longer spend more time with your children and with your husband. You can do lots of things together like taking walks or playing with your children. You can also help your children study and try to explain to them every question that they have. It's very important to see your child to grew [ts] up, to see his first steps and to take him to his first day at school. All this these things are considered to be the joys of life.

Another positive aspect is that you can have more time with your friends. You have the opportunity to stay home with them to watch a movie or to go to the cinema or for shopping. Also you can go clubbing or anything else you like.

One more positive aspect is that you can spent [ts] sometime with yourself. And do things that will relax you. I know that it's it sounds selfish because if you want a super career then you have to be prepared to make sacrifices [sp].

Of course the negatives are powerful too. One drawback is that technology have been raised [ts] and we are obligate [ts] to follow it. Now children and families have more demands. Our needs have become more expensive. Children now need to study more than one language plus computers if they want to find a good job. Moreover, the expenses for the home have been [ts] raised rapidly.

To sum up, I think that everyone if they had the opportunity to choose a job they will probably choose a high-paying job with only eight hours working of work.

[words or letters not needed that were in the text]

[words or letters added to correct the meaning of the text]

[sp] = wrong spelling

[syn] = wrong syntax

[ts] = wrong verb tense

Very weak. Wrong words and poor syntax cause understanding problems. Too many mistakes prevent full development of topic.

Grades – Ielts 4.5/5.0 GRE = Fail \ GMAT FAIL

TOPIC FOR ECPE / TOEFL / CPE / IELTS

The internet was certainly one of the major inventions of the twentieth century and it has radically changed our lives in many ways. But is that a good or a bad thing?

The Internet is surely one of the **most great** **greatest** inventions of the 20th century and it has changed our lives in many ways. The Internet, **also known as** **the world wide web**, has many advantages and disadvantages too.

A great advantage of **the** Internet is that **it has** radically altered the way we communicate. Take, for example, e-mails. Everyone **could** **can** communicate with others all around the world just by sending an e-mail. Another great benefit of the internet is that **it has** revolutionized shopping trends. There are many people who buy things which exist only **on** the internet, such as clothes, mobiles, garden equipment and **anything** that could anyone imagine. Also, it's fascinating how **the** internet has affected education. Every student can have **informations** for his lessons quickly, without looking for hours in an encyclopedia as happened before **the** internet.

On the other hand, **the** internet has many disadvantages too. A great drawback is that when someone works a lot of hours **in** **using** the computer. By using the internet excessively, someone eats unhealthily and also doesn't want to speak to others making him antisocial and a little bit lazy. Also, the internet **is** **can be** dangerous for children, because they have access to pornography and other websites which are not censored.

To sum up, we can say that the invention of **the** internet has helped us a lot when it is used normally, but it can also harm us if we use it impetuously.

[words or letters not needed that were in the text]

[words or letters added to correct the meaning of the text]

[sp] = wrong spelling **[syn]** = wrong syntax **[ts]** = wrong verb tense

Over all - quite strong. A few small mistakes but doesn't distract from understanding. Good use of basic structures. Could have more diverse structures.

Grades – Ielts 6.0/6.5 ECPE pass C / CPE low pass / TOEFL pass / GMAT borderline

PROFICIENCY PUNCTUATION GUIDE

The following punctuation guide is by no means complete; however, it does include the **most important** elements of English language punctuation.

Students often make mistakes and lose points in areas that can, and should, be avoided. One of these areas is the area of punctuation.

I advise you to take a few minutes and review the following pages. The information contained in them could mean the difference between a pass and a fail.

Punctuation is what clarifies written communication. It *simplifies* it. In short, it helps make written work easier to understand. For example, question marks can tell us that an answer is expected, but **how** do we read the question? As in the previous sentence, you probably didn't realize it was a question until the second half of the sentence.

The following punctuation guide is meant to assist you in your writing of English exam essays. Enjoy!

Full stop or period (.)

All statements are followed by a full stop. (US English, period)

Abbreviations (the short way of writing something) are followed by periods. (Mr., Mrs., Dr., Prof.) Don't make up your own abbreviations! There are standards. Learn them and use them. Some short forms, such as TV and UN are not abbreviations. They are pronounced as they are written and they are not followed by full stops.

A full stop, **not a comma**, separates the two parts of a decimal (e.g. 14.3 and is read fourteen **point** three.) This is different than many languages and should be particularly noted. I see and hear this as a common mistake *all too often*.

Comma (,)

A comma comes after "Yes", or "No", at the beginning of a response to a question. (e.g. Did you clean your room? Yes, I did.)

It is placed between adjectives if there are two or more before a noun. (a large, white car).

Commas separate streets, cities and States in addresses. (I live at 3767 South Ross Road, Lansing, Michigan).

Commas are used to separate three or more grammatically equal sentence parts. The parts must have the same subject. (e.g. she picks up the phone, dials the number, and begins to speak loudly. There is **one** subject and three verbs with objects **in a series**.)

A comma separates the introductory statement from the actual words of the speaker in direct quotations. (e.g. she said, "Is that Mrs. Alexander?")

Commas, separate numbers into groups of thousands (e.g. there are over 10,000,000,000 websites in the internet... and counting)

When you address one person in a quote (e.g. "You know, Mr. Jackson, my wife knows your wife.") Commas come before question tags (e.g. You are not a teacher, are you?) We use commas after exclamations like "oh", or "well" (e.g. Oh, that's nice.) Commas are used to set off appositions. Be sure to include commas before and after the apposition. (e.g. Dr. Childs and his friend, Dr. Parent, went skating.)

Words like: hence, therefore, for example, for instance, consequently, as it were, moreover, on the other hand, on the contrary, in the first place, must be placed between commas.

After introductory adverbial phrases or clauses which are more than three or four words long (e.g. When the water reaches the top of the bucket, empty it.)

Non-defining clauses are always set off from the rest of the sentence by commas. (e.g. Kiriakos, who came from Greece a year ago, is one of the tallest students). Defining clauses are never separated from the words they modify! (It was Kiriakos who came from Greece a year ago)

A comma is used to separate a conditional clause at the beginning of a sentence. (e.g. If it rains, the game will be postponed.)

Semicolon (;

When two statements are closely related about the same subject or idea, they can be joined by a semicolon and the two statements make one sentence.

A semicolon is not used when two statements are joined by a connector except in very long sentences.

The section after the semicolon expresses ideas furthering the thought expressed in the preceding section. (e.g. The train pulled off; he settled into his seat to enjoy the scenery of the countryside.)

Semicolons can separate phrases if a very definite pause is indicated. (e.g. He stopped abruptly; immediately ahead he saw the figure of a man walking in the snow).

Colon (:

Colons can be used in similar fashion as the semicolon. The section after the colon refers back to the preceding section by exemplifying, explaining or illustrating what has gone before. (e.g. He is not a good friend: he can not keep secrets and never does what others want to do.)

A colon is used between a general statement and a list of examples. (e.g. We always take a lot of supplies: bread, meat, tomatoes, potato chips, pickles, fruit, cake and coffee.)

Use a colon after the name of each speaker when writing dialogue and **not** using quotation marks.
Sally: Hello, Harry, how are you? Harry: Very well, thank you, Sally.

A colon can introduce a quotation the same way a comma does, though this is less common. (e.g. John said: "I won't do it.")

A colon is used after certain standard words or abbreviations such as, Note: (take notice), or N.B: (take good notice). (e.g. Note: Not everyone agrees with this view.)

Apostrophe (')

All contractions contain an apostrophe in the places where the letters have been left out. (e.g. won't, it's, we're, we'll, I'll etc.)

The word o'clock contains an apostrophe, as it means "of the clock".

It is used for the formation of the genitive showing possession. (e.g. The Manager's tie is red).

It is also used in the words of time: second, minute, hour, day, week, month, year, today, yesterday, and tomorrow to indicate specific time or duration of time. These are also called possessives. (e.g. A moment's hesitation, two weeks' notice, yesterday's newspaper, tomorrow's forecast.)

Hyphen (-)

A hyphen between two or more words shows they are connected. In many cases the hyphen is not regarded as very important in English; its use is often optional. The following are suggestions only, not necessarily, "grammar rules".

Place a hyphen between the hour and the minutes when writing time. (e.g. Peter gets up at seven-thirty.)

In expressions like: person-to-person or station-to-station. (e.g. Bill phones his mother person-to-person.)

Compound numerals from twenty-one up to ninety-nine should have hyphens. (e.g. twenty-one, twenty-two... thirty-one, sixty-two, one hundred and eighty- seven.)

A hyphen is used at the end of a line (never at the beginning) to indicate that a word has been broken. If you are not sure of this technique it's best not to break words at all. In fact, with modern word processing and the "justifying" of texts, nowadays, this practice is quickly becoming a memory.

Some adjectives require a hyphen. (e.g. a silk-lined coat)

A hyphen after the prefix re- suggests “again”. (Compare: re-decorate a room to: recover from an illness).

A hyphen may separate a re-prefix from a word beginning with an e or o. (e.g. re-establish, co-operate, co-ordinate)

Nouns and gerunds forming a compound noun are usually separated by a hyphen (e.g. letter-writing activities, English-speaking countries).

Nouns, adjectives or adverbs and present or past participles form an adjective when hyphenated. (e.g. hand-made, semi-detached, well-constructed, fast-moving).

A hyphen may link a prefix such as pre-, pro-, post-, anti-, ex- with a proper or abstract noun. (e.g. pre-Hellenic, post-Elizabeth, anti-Socialist, pro-Capitalist, ex- Prime Minister)

The following **are always** written as two separate words: fire station, bus station, post office, town hall, grammar school, hat factory, dog licence, public house, railway station.

The following are **usually** written as a single word: needlework, shopkeeper, playground, (but, recreation ground), shipbuilding, handwork, homework, headmaster, typewriter, newspaper, timetable.

Exceptions: traffic-warden, house-painter, mouse-trap, dog-kennel. North-East. A hyphen separates the two words of a fraction (e.g. two-thirds, three-quarters, five-sixths, three-eighths.)

Question mark (?)

Every question is followed by a question mark, isn't it?

Quotation marks or inverted commas (“ ”) or (‘ ’)

They are placed before the first word and after the last word of a quoted utterance. (e.g. He shouted, “I shall find you.”)

They can be pairs or single for direct speech as well as all other cases. Both marks are placed above the words they enclose. A **comma** precedes the opening of a direct speech and there is a comma at the end of direct speech. (e.g. He said, “come here right now,” and got up.)

Note: If the words “and got up” were omitted, there would be a full stop in the place of the second comma.

End-of-the statement commas and periods go **inside** the quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation marks also are placed inside the quotation marks. (e.g. He shouted, “Is there anybody here?” “What a lovely day!” he said.)

When quoted speech is broken by explanatory words like: “he said”, “the man replied” etc., inverted commas are placed after the speaker's last word. The rest of the speaker's words are

enclosed within another pair of inverted commas without capitalizing the initial letter. (e.g. “Take me to the station,” said the woman, “and hurry up!” “With this traffic” replied the driver, “it will take at an hour.”

Inverted commas (in “pairs” or ‘single’) are placed before and after titles of books, plays, films, magazines, ships etc.

Examples:

“Gone with the Wind” (book)

“The Titanic” (ship)

“South Pacific” (play)

“The International Herald Tribune” (newspaper)

“The Deer Hunter” (film)

“Newsweek” (magazine)

Inverted commas may be used for slang and other words that a writer wants to emphasize (usually words used ironically). (e.g. There has been some “enlightened” opinions expressed lately on the legislation and legalization of marijuana). It’s obvious in the example that the writer does not approve of the legislation of marijuana by his use of inverted commas highlighting the word “enlightened”.

Exclamation mark (!)

An exclamation mark is placed after a single word of exclamation or a phrase of exclamation. (e.g. “Oh!” cried Jane, “Good heavens!”)

It is used at the end of clauses beginning with “what” and “how.” (e.g. What a lovely day! How excited you must be!)

Sometimes it’s used after phrases with a meaning of command. (e.g. The examination has begun. Not a sound!)

With wishes or curses. (e.g. May you live a long and happy life! Damn this traffic! We’ll never get there on time.)

Brackets and Dashes (--)

They are both used to separate a word group of words expressing an idea which is independent of the main thought of the sentence. The idea in [brackets] or – dashes – may be a definition, an alternative, a comment or an afterthought. (e.g. She is in her early forties-although she never discusses her age-of small height and dark complexion.)

The dash also indicates that the speech was left unfinished for some reason. This can also be indicated by a line of dots. (e.g. “I don’t remember putting it...” he said and suddenly cried “there it is!” lifting a card from the drawer.)

Brackets, dashes and dots... are all used specifically. Don’t make a habit of overusing them.

CAPITAL LETTERS

The first word of every sentence begins with a capital letter.

Capitalise the first word of a line of poetry.

All titles begin with capital letters when they are used with a person's name. (e.g. Miss, Mrs., Mr., Dr., Capt., Prof.) Do not capitalise words of rank, title or profession when they are used alone.

All names of people, first, middle and last plus proper nouns begin with capital letters. (e.g. John Scott Smith, Mary Helen Jones, the Nile, the Gaza strip).

Capitalise the names of organizations, buildings, schools, companies etc. (e.g. "Young Men's Christian Association", "Empire State Building", "American Telephone and Telegraph Co.", "Coca-Cola", "Abraham Lincoln High School".)

Note: the words: building, company, school, hospital are not capitalised when they do not form part of the name.

Adjectives derived from the names of peoples, nations, races, tribes, religions and languages begin with a capital letter. (e.g. Greek, American, French, Mongolian, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Swahili: a Greek village, a Swedish town.

Names of school courses are written with capital letters. (e.g. Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, History).

Names of the days of the week are written with a capital letter. (e.g. Monday, Tuesday, Saturday, Sunday.)

Names of holidays are written with a capital letter. (e.g. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter).

Names of streets, states, cities, countries and continents are capitalised (e.g. Church Street, Michigan, New York, Greece, Asia, Africa). But the word street is not capitalised when it is not part of a name.

The words north, east, south and west are **not** capitalised except when they are parts of names. (e.g. South America, North Pole). As initials only, these words **are** capitalised. (e.g. N.E., S.W.)

The names of the seasons are **not** capitalised (e.g. spring, summer, autumn, winter) / The months are capitalised. (e.g. January, March, May etc.)

The first quoted word of a speaker is always capitalised even if it occurs in the middle of a sentence. (e.g. He mumbled "Good night", and went upstairs to bed.)

The more important words in the names of books, newspapers, magazines, films, plays, ships, are capitalised.

Examples:

“A Tale of Two Cities” (book)
“A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (play)
“The Pacific Princess” (ship)

“The Grapes of Wrath” (film)
“Woman’s Day” (magazine)
“The Daily Express” (newspaper)

The more important words in a title, or heading are capitalised (e.g. “The Problems Affecting a Student’s Choice of Courses at University”) or (The Television Programmes I have Least Enjoyed”)

The personal pronoun “I” is **always** a capital. Even in emails!

Initials of degrees are always capital letters. (e.g. He got his M.A. before his Ph. D)

The word “Yours” at the conclusion of letters is always capitalised, (e.g. “Yours sincerely” but “Very truly yours”)

Capitalise names of rivers, lakes, seas, oceans, bays (e.g. The Thames, Lake Michigan, The Aegean Sea, The Pacific Ocean, The Mississippi River, The Atlantic Ocean, The Gulf of Mexico.)

Names of parks are capitalised (e.g. Hyde Park, Central Park) Important historical events, historical periods, historical documents are capitalised. (e.g. Civil War, Middle Ages, Renaissance, World War II, Declaration of Independence, The Crusades etc.)

Nouns and adjectives referring to the Deity are capitalised (e.g. God, Supreme Being, Supreme Creator, the Almighty, the Saviour, the Lord, and the Divinity)

Capitalise the names of the “Bible” or parts of the Bible and names of other sacred books (e.g. Old Testament, Scriptures, Book of Job, New Testament, The Genesis, The Book of Prayer, Koran, etc.)

Capitalise words showing family relationships when used with the name of the person involved (e.g. Uncle John, Aunt Martha.)

Capitalise names of planets, stars, constellations (e.g. Mars, Jupiter, Neptune, Saturn, Venus, and Moon.)

Note: Do not capitalise the words earth, moon and sun, unless you are listing them with other astronomical names. (e.g. In the solar system, the Sun and the Moon influence life on the Earth.)

But: The population of the earth is increasing alarmingly.

The sun shone brightly through the window. There was a full moon last night.