CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH WRITING · STUDENT GUIDE



Plan it. Write it. Check it.

B1 Preliminary

B2 First

C1 Advanced

The MaySpeak 6-step writing plan: a visual guide to planning any Cambridge writing task.

1 **Analyse** — 2 **Content** — 3 **Organise** — 4 **Language** — 5 **Write** — 6 **Check**

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Plan it. Write it. Check it.

The MaySpeak 6-step writing plan — a visual guide to planning any Cambridge writing task, from B1 to C1.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES · CEFR B1–C1

- ✓ **I can** analyse a task: text type, reader, purpose, register and word count.
- ✓ **I can** generate ideas and develop them with Statement → Reason → Example.
- ✓ **I can** organise my text in clear, balanced paragraphs.
- ✓ **I can** choose connectors, grammar and expressions for my level.
- ✓ **I can** manage my time in the exam.
- ✓ **I can** check my text against the four Cambridge marking criteria.

PLAN · about 20% of your time | **WRITE · 65%** | **CHECK · 15%**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Analyse	**Content**	**Organise**	**Language**	**Write**	**Check**
Read the task. Who? Why? How formal? How long?	Brainstorm ideas. Choose the best. Statement + Reason + Example	Plan paragraphs and word counts: open · P1 · P2 · P3 · close	Connectors, grammar, vocab, expressions for your level	Follow your plan. One idea per paragraph.	Content, register, organisation, mistakes, words

Golden rule: never start writing until steps 1–4 are on paper. A 5-minute plan saves 15 minutes of problems.

Which exam? What do I write?

B1 B1 Preliminary

Writing paper · 45 minutes · 2 tasks

Part 1	Email (compulsory) **about 100 words**
Part 2	Article *or* story **about 100 words**

B2 B2 First

Writing paper · 1 hour 20 minutes · 2 tasks

Part 1	Essay (compulsory) **140–190 words**
Part 2	Article, email/letter, report *or* review **140–190 words**

C1 C1 Advanced

Writing paper · 1 hour 30 minutes · 2 tasks

Part 1	Essay (compulsory) **220–260 words**
Part 2	Email/letter, proposal, report *or* review **220–260 words**

Look for the B1 B2 C1 tags in this guide: use the language for your level, and try some from the next level up.

1 Analyse the question

Read the task twice. Underline the key words. Answer five questions before you do anything else.

WHAT?	WHO?	WHY?	HOW?	HOW MUCH?
Text type email, article, story, essay, report, review, proposal	**Reader** a friend, a teacher, a manager, website readers	**Purpose** inform, describe, recommend, persuade, complain, suggest	**Register** formal, neutral or informal (see below)	**Word count** the range in the task + your target

Example: analyse this task

MAYSPEAK PRACTICE TASK · B1-STYLE ARTICLE

You see this notice on an English-language travel website[2].

Articles wanted!
Which city in your country would you recommend to a visitor? What can people do there? And why should they visit?[3]

Write an article[1] answering these questions.
Write about 100 words[4].

1. **Text type: article**
   Give it a title. Engage the reader — a question or a surprising fact at the start works well.
2. **Reader: people you don't know**
   So the register is **neutral / semi-informal** : friendly, lively, but not "Hi guys!!"
3. **Three content points**
   Which city · what to do · why visit. Answer all three or you lose Content marks.
4. **Word count: about 100**
   MaySpeak target: **100–110 words** — the full count plus 10%.

Register: how formal should I be?

INFORMAL ← **NEUTRAL** → **FORMAL**

Friends & family
Email to a friend, a story
contractions (I'm, don't) · phrasal verbs (find out) · questions & exclamations

"Can you tell me when it starts?"

Hi Sam, ... · Write soon! / Love, ...

The general public
Article, review, most essays
some contractions OK · clear, polite, engaging · speaks to "you", the reader

"Could you let me know when it starts?"

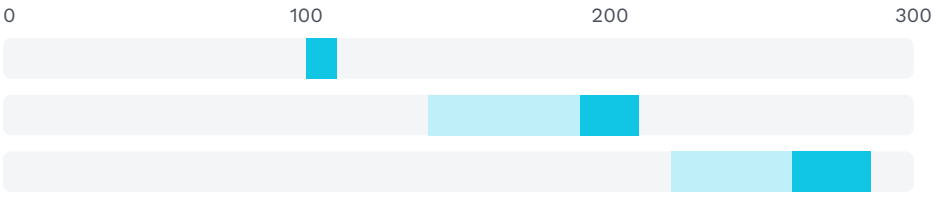
Title · Have you ever...? · So why not...?

Officials & strangers
Report, proposal, formal letter/email
no contractions · passive · longer linkers · headings in reports

"I would be grateful if you could inform me of the start date."

Dear Sir or Madam, ... Yours faithfully,

Word count: aim for the maximum (and up to 10% more)



More language = more marks. Every extra sentence is a chance to show the examiner your range of grammar and vocabulary.

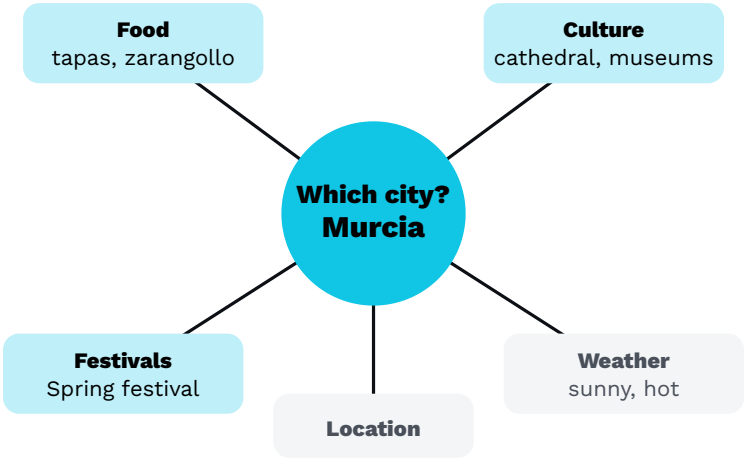
Go for the top. Aim for the maximum in the task, and up to 10% more. Light blue = range in the task · cyan = your MaySpeak target.

Too short? You probably haven't developed your ideas or answered every point. Quick count: words in one line × number of lines.

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2 Content: find and develop your ideas

Brainstorm fast, choose your best ideas, then build each one with Statement → Reason → Example.



Brainstorm in 2 minutes

- Put the question in the centre. Write **every** idea — single words, Spanish if needed.
- **Choose 2–3 ideas** (the cyan ones). Pick ideas you can **explain well in English**, not just the "best" ones.
- Each chosen idea = **one body paragraph**.
- Check: does every idea answer a point in the task?

Essays (B2/C1): you get two notes in the task — use both — and add **your own idea** as the third point.

Develop each idea: Statement → Reason → Example

STATEMENT What is your point? → **REASON** Why is it true? → **EXAMPLE** Prove it / make it real.

	Statement	Reason	Example
B1	Murcia is a great city for food lovers.	This is because the vegetables come from local farms, so they are fresh and cheap.	For example, you can try zarangollo, a traditional dish made with courgette and egg.
B2	If you love food, Murcia is hard to beat.	Since the city is surrounded by farmland, restaurants use incredibly fresh local produce.	Take zarangollo, for instance: a simple dish of courgette and egg that locals adore.
C1	For anyone with an appetite, Murcia is arguably Spain's best-kept culinary secret.	Surrounded as it is by the *huerta*, its kitchens have access to produce that would cost a fortune elsewhere.	A case in point is zarangollo, a deceptively simple dish of courgette and egg that has been perfected over generations.

Same idea, three levels: look at how the connectors, grammar and vocabulary grow. That is what "range" means in the marking criteria.

Content checklist

- [ ] I answer **every** point / question in the task.
- [ ] My ideas are relevant — nothing "off topic".
- [ ] Each idea has a reason and an example.
- [ ] The reader has all the information they need.

Stuck for ideas? Think about...

people · money · time · health · environment · education · technology · free time · past vs. present · advantages vs. disadvantages

Use a personal example (B1) or a general / hypothetical one (B2–C1: "Imagine a family who...").

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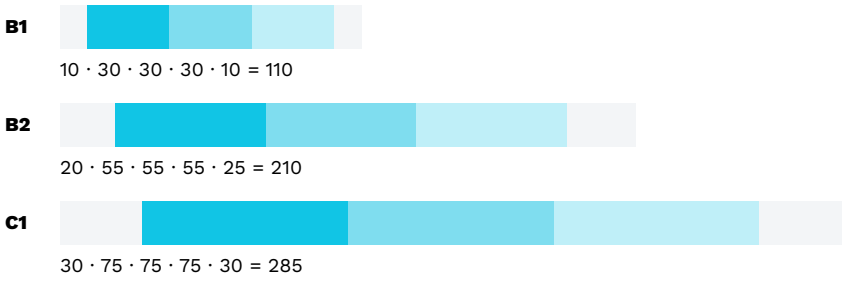
3 Organisation: build the skeleton

Short opening, balanced body paragraphs, short closing. Plan how many words each paragraph gets.

10	**Open**	set the scene
30	**P1 · Idea 1** Statement Reason · Example	
30	**P2 · Idea 2** Statement Reason · Example	
30	**P3 · Idea 3** Statement Reason · Example	
10	**Close**	final thought

Words per paragraph for a B1 task
(10 + 30 + 30 + 30 + 10 = 110)

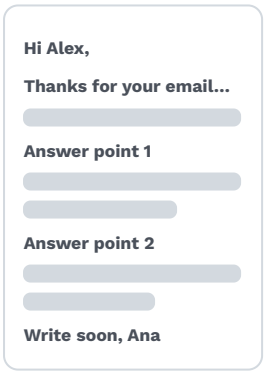
Scale it to your level



Paragraph rules

- **One idea = one paragraph.** New idea? New paragraph.
- Start each paragraph with a clear **topic sentence** (your Statement).
- Body paragraphs should be **similar in length** — balance looks organised.
- Leave a **blank line** between paragraphs so the examiner can see your structure.
- Only two ideas? Fine: open · P1 · P2 · close, with longer body paragraphs.

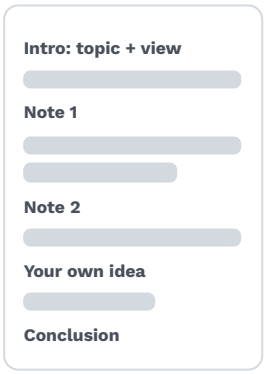
Every text type has its own shape



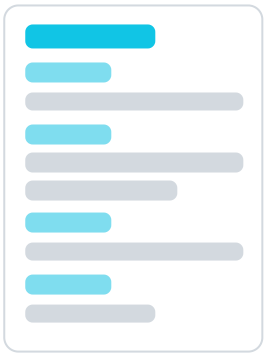
Email / letter
Greeting · reason for writing · points · sign-off



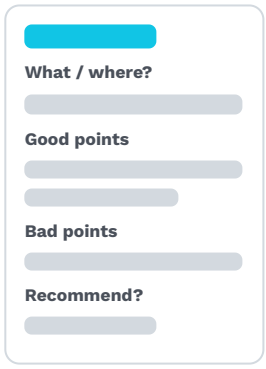
Article
Catchy title · talk to the reader · lively ending



Essay B2 C1
Balanced · clear opinion at the end



Report / proposal B2 C1
Title + headings · formal · recommendations



Review B2 C1
Describe · evaluate · recommend

Story B1 **:** beginning (who, where, when) → problem → climax → ending. Use the first sentence you are given, keep the same tense (usually past), and add feelings and a little direct speech.

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4 Language: choose your tools

Before you write, choose 3–4 connectors, 1–2 grammar structures and 2 expressions to include. Write them in your plan.

Connectors	B1	B2	C1
Adding	and, also, too, as well as	In addition, What's more, Furthermore	Moreover, Not only... but also..., On top of that
Contrasting	but, however, although	whereas, despite / in spite of, On the other hand	Nevertheless, Even so, While it is true that..., Admittedly
Cause & result	because, so, that's why	since, due to, As a result, therefore	Consequently, owing to, hence, which is why
Examples	for example, like	for instance, such as	A case in point is..., To illustrate,...
Opinion	I think, In my opinion	Personally, I believe..., As far as I'm concerned	I would argue that..., It seems to me that...
Concluding	To sum up, In the end	All in all, To conclude	On balance, Taking everything into account

Grammar to show range

B1 present perfect · comparatives & superlatives · first conditional · should / must / can · going to

B2 second & third conditionals · relative clauses · passive · *used to* · modals of deduction (*must have been*)

C1 inversion (*Never have I...*) · cleft sentences (*What I love most is...*) · mixed conditionals · participle clauses · *It is said that...*

Expressions, idioms, phrasal verbs

B1 find out · look forward to · have a great time · it's worth visiting

B2 make the most of · can't help + -ing · put up with · it's well worth + -ing

C1 off the beaten track · spoilt for choice · a far cry from · come to terms with

Idioms belong in emails, articles and reviews, **not** in reports or formal letters.

Upgrade your words

good	→	**really good** B1	→	**impressive** B2	→	**outstanding** C1
a lot of	→	**lots of** B1	→	**plenty of** B2	→	**a wealth of** C1
bad	→	**terrible** B1	→	**disappointing** B2	→	**far from ideal** C1
I think	→	**I believe** B1	→	**As far as I'm concerned** B2	→	**I would argue that** C1

Watch out! Common mistakes for Spanish speakers

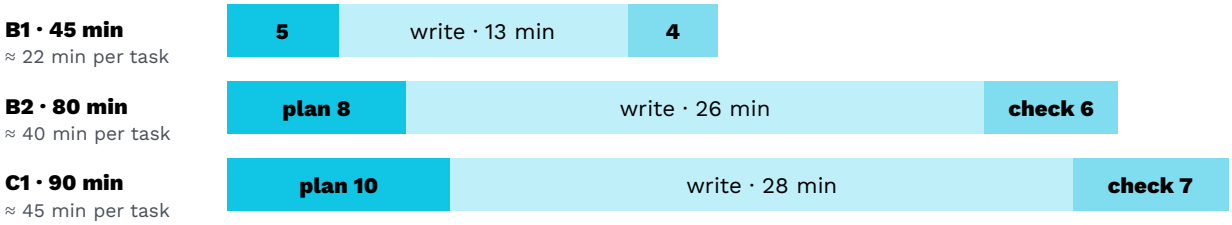
~~People is friendly.~~ → People **are** friendly.	~~I have 20 years.~~ → I **am** 20.	~~Explain me~~ → Explain **to me**
~~The life in Murcia...~~ → **Life** in Murcia...	~~actually~~ (= *actualmente*) → **currently**	~~assist a class~~ → **attend** a class
~~It's very interesting visit...~~ → It's very interesting **to** visit...	~~In my opinion I think...~~ → choose one!	~~make a party~~ → **have** a party

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5·6 Write it, then check it

Follow your plan, watch the clock, and always leave time to check.

Manage your time (per task)



B1 bar: plan 5 · write 13 · check 4 minutes. Suggested MaySpeak timings — adapt them as you get faster.

Step 5 · Write

- **Follow your plan** — no new ideas halfway through.
- Write a **plan, not a full draft**: there's no time to copy everything out twice.
- Use the connectors and structures you chose in Step 4.
- Leave a blank line between paragraphs.
- Write clearly. If the examiner can't read it, it can't get marks.
- Do the task you feel strongest in first.

Step 6 · Check — read it 3 times

1st read · The task: all points answered? Right register? Right text type?

2nd read · Organisation: clear paragraphs? Connectors used correctly?

3rd read · Mistakes: verbs & tenses · subject–verb agreement (*he goes*) · articles · prepositions · plurals · spelling · punctuation · word count

Your plan = the Cambridge marking criteria

Each task is marked on four criteria, from 0 to 5 each (20 marks per task). Every step of your plan targets one of them.

1 · Analyse	2 · Content	3 · Organisation	4 · Language
↓	↓	↓	↓
Communicative Achievement right text type, register and effect on the reader	**Content** all points relevant and reader fully informed	**Organisation** logical paragraphs, connected ideas	**Language** range and accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

My personal error list. Write the 3 mistakes your teacher corrects most often in your writing. Check for these every time.

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PLAN

My writing plan

Print this page or copy the boxes onto your exam paper. Level: B1 B2 C1 Task: _____

1 Analyse

TEXT TYPE	READER	PURPOSE	REGISTER (CIRCLE)	WORDS
			informal · neutral · formal	range ____ aim ____

2 Content — brainstorm, then circle your best 2–3 ideas

QUESTION

3 Organisation

Paragraph	Words	Statement	Reason	Example
Open				
P1 · Idea 1				
P2 · Idea 2				
P3 · Idea 3				
Close				

4 Language I will use

3 CONNECTORS	1–2 GRAMMAR STRUCTURES	2 EXPRESSIONS / WORDS

6 Check

- ☐ All points answered
- ☐ Right register
- ☐ Clear paragraphs
- ☐ Mistakes checked
- ☐ Word count OK

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