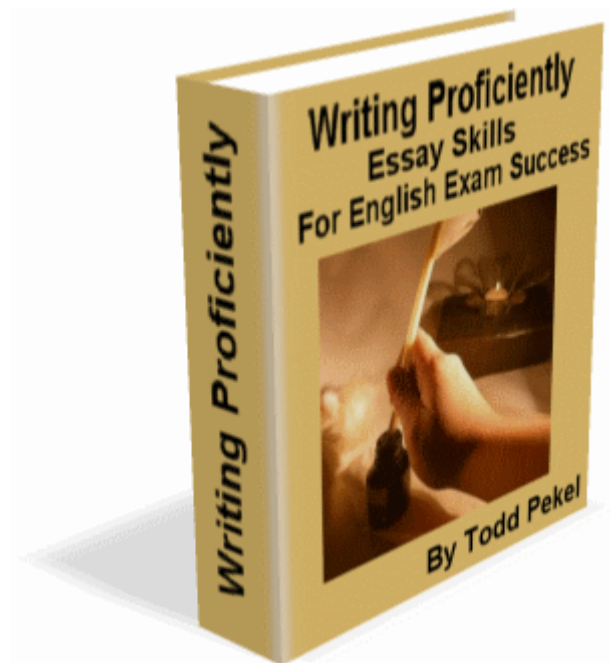


Writing Proficiently

Essay Skills For English Exam Success



Todd Pikel

E-book Cover Design - <http://www.learn-to-draw-and-paint.com>

Dedication

This book is dedicated to everyone who reads its contents and applies its principles. My hope is that you find the following material to be practical, useful and rewarding in your attempts at, ***Writing Proficiently***.

Special Thanks

Every author owes a debt of gratitude to someone. I want to say a special thank you to my dear friend,

Christina

Thank you for all of your help and support.

God Bless.

You know... that I know!

: -)

Table of Contents

Introduction	Writing Styles
First Things First	Overused Words
Brainstorming	First and Last Impressions
Common Phrases	How to Begin
Opinion Essays	Writing the Body
For and Against Essays	Writing Conclusions
Problem Solving Essays	Sample Outlines
Transitional Phrases	Sample Essays
Proficiency Builders	Punctuation Guide
More Proficiency Builders	

Introduction

The following material has been prepared to help students with the written section of the various English language examinations in use today. Examinations like the ECPE, CPE, TOEFL, IELTS, MELAB and MELICET all require the student to produce a variety of written work at a proficient level of the English language.

Before we discuss the writing challenges of your particular test, there are a couple of things you should know about writing English essays at the proficiency level.

First, writing at this level is not something that comes naturally to people. It requires work. Second, writing is one of those areas that we tend to leave until last. In other words, writing is something that we seem to spend the least amount of time on, even though it ought to actually require more of our attention.

This combination can cause you disappointment on your exams by receiving a fail mark for your written work. This needn't be the case, though, and I'll tell you why.

I have shared the following material with many students over the years and those who have learned and applied the principles set forth in the next pages have passed the written section of their exams without any difficulties.

Now, I don't claim to know everything there is to know about writing essays, but what I **do** know is this; what follows has proven to be **effective** for those who have learned and applied it.

The knowledge contained in these pages has been developed and perfected in more than fifteen years of classroom experience with students just like you. I have assisted literally hundreds and hundreds of students acquire internationally recognized English language certificates and diplomas from well known Universities, private organizations and even government agencies.

Keep in mind that all of them had to pass the written section of the exam in order to receive their diplomas. Therefore, it can (and has) been done.

It is my hope and belief that this book will assist you in accomplishing your goals.

I thank you for allowing me to play a small role in your success.

Todd Pikel
Your Success Assistant!

First Things 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!

They 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.

- - - Writing Proficiently - - -

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**
2. **Body**
3. **Conclusion**

3. **Conclusion**
2. **Body (examples)**
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 choose 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...

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, | I feel / believe that... |
| ❖ To conclude, | I am inclined to believe that... |
| ❖ All things considered, | I am convinced that... |
| ❖ Taking everything into account | It is my opinion / belief that... |
| ❖ For the above-mentioned reasons, | I (don't) agree that... |
| ❖ To sum up, | |
| ❖ All in all, | |

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 solve
Another / An alternative way / suggestion to overcome this (the) problem
(of)...is/

combat
deal with
would be

Steps should be taken in order to solve
Measures must so as to overcome this (the) problem (of)...
combat
deal with

If...happened / were to happen, the result
the effect would be
the consequence

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 of this / (-ing) would be...
effect might be...
consequence

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

Place and Location

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

Actions

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

Action +	so as not to	+ result or purpose of action
	so as to	
	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 and 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...

This is not a grammar book nor do I intend to teach you all the grammar rules associated with good writing. The **proficiency builders** above (as I call them) are areas I find most students have difficulties with when constructing their compositions.

Having graded by now **thousands of compositions** from students of all ability levels, I believe the above to be essential to your writing success, hence the inclusion in this book.

You would be well advised to print out these pages and have them with you as a guide when you write your essays. Remember, it's the *details* at this level of the language that are important.

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

<p>Use Formal Connectors</p> <p>consequently, in other words, furthermore</p> <p>Use Passive Constructions</p> <p>it is believed / claimed to be / that...</p> <p>Use Inversion</p> <p>Not until... did / Not only... do</p> <p>Use Advanced Vocabulary</p> <p>informed decisions, debatable subject, tragic consequences</p>	<p>Use Contractions</p> <p>don't believe, there aren't it isn't</p> <p>Use Colloquial Expressions</p> <p>I didn't catch / get the meaning</p> <p>Overuse Simple Vocabulary</p> <p>I think / very good / bad</p> <p>Overuse Simple Connectors</p> <p>and, but, also because</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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 woman 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. **P**eter **p**iper **p**icked a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers.

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.

Most good, effective essay writing will include a combination of some of the style elements mentioned above. It will be worth your while to actually use some of the various techniques mentioned.

Again, practice is necessary to perfect your writing, especially when dealing with new techniques.

Overused Words!

As a teacher, one of the things I encourage my students to do is to learn of few of the words from the following lists. Believe it or not, they can go a long way to making your writing more proficient and have a greater impact on those who are reading your writing.

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
Adverse Opposing Disruptive Contrary Bad Unfavorable	Positive Satisfactory Acceptable Excellent Valuable Beneficial

IMPORTANT	VERY
Essential Crucial Imperative Vital Significant	Highly Exceedingly Severely Immensely Utterly Extremely Excessively

UNDERSTAND	DANGEROUS	BELIEVE
Comprehend Grasp Perceive Realize Recognize Enlightened	Alarming Risky Hazardous Critical Serious Perilous	Hold Contend Think Maintain Claim Argue

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.

The good news is that you are well on your way to doing that very thing by reading this book and doing the exercises I've compelled you to do.

As I explain on my website, 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, which-ever 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, which-ever 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.

As I always tell my students, 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 I read essays that 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, I strongly suggest you find someone who knows how to write at the level you desire, and ask them or have them help you by 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.

Students in our language schools at the proficiency level of English typically write at least **thirty** essays (after being taught the material in this book) before they take their exams. Many of them write many more than this number as they follow a two year proficiency preparation course.

I share this information to emphasize your need to write as **many** essays as possible before you take your exam.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

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

TOEFL

You have **thirty minutes** to write a composition of about 250-300 words.

If you could change one important thing about your country, what would you change? Use specific examples to support your answer.

What are some important qualities of a good school teacher? Use specific details and examples to explain why these qualities are important.

Many say that the internet is the most important invention ever. Do you agree or disagree with this and if not, what do you believe to be more important? Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? People pay too much attention to the less important things in life and fail to see the larger issues. Use specific reasons and details to explain your opinion.

Which do you feel is more important in your life: security or freedom and independence? Use reasons and specific examples to support your opinion.

A job should mean a job for life. Do you agree or disagree? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? With the help of technology, life is easier today than in the past. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? A problem shared is a problem solved. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

Some music is very inspirational. Other music seems boring and meaningless. Which type of music do you listen to and why do you think some music forms are much more popular than others? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

If you could travel back in time or into the future, which would you choose and what exact period of time would you like to experience? Use specific reasons and examples to support your choice.

A large new shopping mall will soon open near your home. Discuss how this will impact you and your neighbors' lives. Will the impact be only positive?

Describe your favourite film. Give full details including actors and plot. State why you liked it and why you would recommend it to others.

Write a composition both for and against getting married at twenty years of age.

It has been said that the generation gap is unbridgeable. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Give reasons to support your view.

Is specialization a good thing? Discuss

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'.

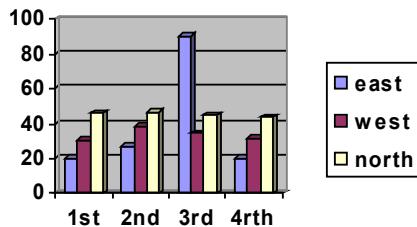
Would you rather live in the country or in the city? Describe the advantages and disadvantages of both.

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

IELTS

You have **60 minutes** to complete the **two tasks**.

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)



The graph above shows quarterly traffic statistics for the suburbs of the large metropolitan area. Write a report for a college lecturer explaining the information.

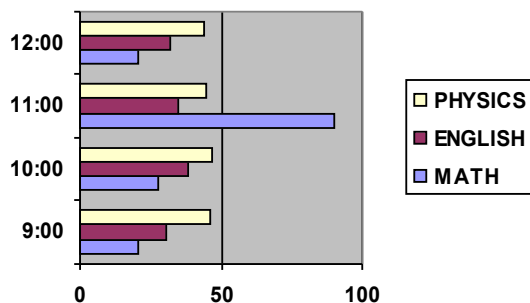
You should explain: trends, future projections, data anomalies

Task 2 – Academic Essay (about 250 words)

Given that most university lecturers now post their notes on the internet for students to access, the importance of actually attending classes have been reduced.

Do you believe the use of the internet for university level education a good idea? What effects will the internet have on future study at universities? Discuss.

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)



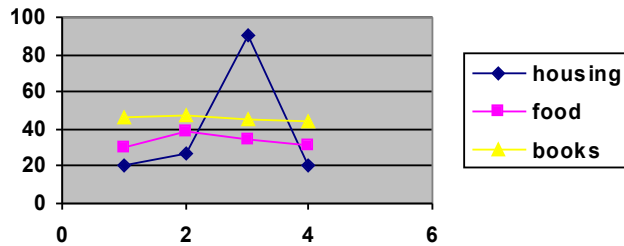
The above graph shows the number of students taking core courses at your university. Explain the data to a friend noting trends, scheduling difficulties and anything else you feel is important to note.

Task 2 Academic Essay (about 250 words)

The idea "innocent until proven guilty" plays a major role in the way courts conduct themselves. Some countries go so far as to allow no access to the defendant's prior criminal record when conducting a case in an attempt to protect the one being accused of the crime.

Do you think that this is a good practice? Or do you think that the jury should have access to a defendant's past criminal record?

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)

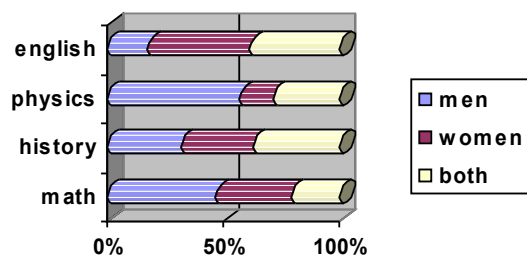


The above indicates average costs during the school year. Interpret the data explaining any abnormalities with possible reasons.

Task 2 – Academic Essay (about 250 words)

Rising education costs have prevented many students from finishing their degrees as the cost of education has become too dear. Should higher education be free as with grade school and secondary school?

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)

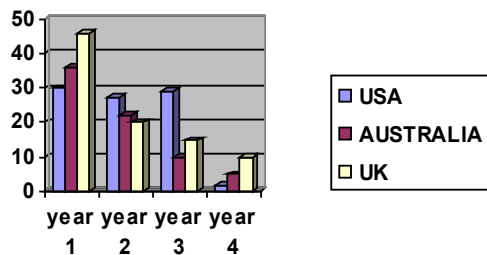


The chart above depicts the percentage of men and women enrolled in various courses at the local college. What does the information tell you? Interpret the information above for your college counselor.

Task 2 – Academic Essay (about 250 words)

Entertainment is big business. Discuss what is meant by the former statement using information and examples from your own life to illustrate your position.

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)

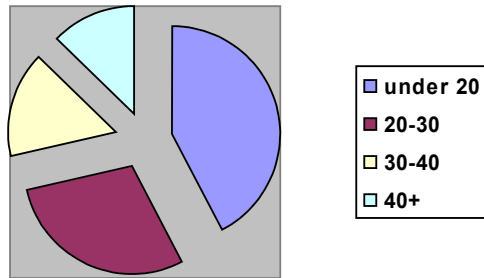


The information above shows the drop out rate by school year and country for university level studies. Compare the findings fro your instructor.

Task 2 – Academic Essay (about 250 words)

Some employers tie an individual’s compensation package to specific company goals. (i.e. sales or costs) Is this is fair to the individual? To the company? Support your ideas.

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)

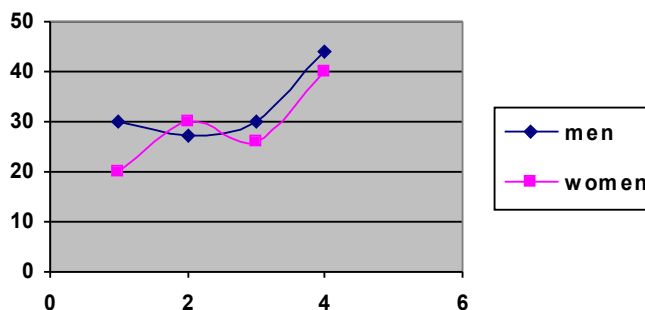


The preceding pie chart shows money spent on entertainment by various age groups. Discuss the chart and its findings. What conclusions can you draw?

Task 2 – Academic Essay (about 250 words)

It has been said that the “Olympic Ideal” is dead. Discuss

Task 1 – Information Interpretation (about 150 words)



The preceding shows the average wages of men and women by age and the number of years worked at the present position. Interpret the data for your economics instructor.

Task 2 – Academic Essay (about 250 words)

Failure and success walk hand in hand. To what extent to you agree with the preceding statement? Give reasons for your answer.

Sample Outlines and 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.

The outlines below should help you to include all the important information.

Describing People

Introduction

Who the person is / when and how you first met

Para 1

Describe their appearance (be specific)

Para2

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 just like you. My 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 met 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 **the** convenience food to a full meal. This new unhealthy diet, however, combined **to 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 **fattering fattening** too. As our diet is getting worse and worse, obesity has become a serious problem even for young people. **Especially** children find it **especially** hard to resist to the wide variety of attractive **choises**, [sp] which a place like a fast food restaurant advertises.

In addition to obesity, there **are is** 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 **occasionally** 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, **the** 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** positive **s** and negative **s** 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 **s** 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 **see 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 **s** selfish because if you want a super career then you have to be prepared to make **sacrifies** **[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 **demandings** **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 **in** **on** the internet, such as clothes, mobiles, garden equipment and **everything** **anything** that could anyone imagine. Also, it's fascinating how **the** internet has affected education. Every student can have information **s** 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.

I find 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)
"South Pacific" (play)
"The Deer Hunter" (film)
"The Titanic" (ship)
"The International Herald Tribune" (newspaper)
"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.

- - - Writing Proficiently - - -

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.

Example: "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.

Wishing you great Success!
Todd