



WRITING TEST GUIDELINES

Format

The writing test consists of just one part, a 250 word essay, which you have 45 minutes to write.

The questions usually consist of a statement concerning an issue of contemporary interest which indicates that people have different opinions on the topic (for example, education, health, the environment etc). In your essay you are expected to discuss these differing viewpoints and to come to a conclusion or give your opinion. You are also asked to support your argument with examples and your own experience.

For example:

Television has had a significant influence on the culture of many societies. To what extent would you say that television has affected the cultural development of your society?

Writing your essay

Four criteria are used to mark the essay:

Task Achievement

This looks at how developed your response to the question is. Have you answered all parts of the task? Have you developed your ideas and supported them appropriately?

Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence refers to how convincing your writing is. Is your argument clear, well-structured and persuasive?

Cohesion refers to the flow of your writing. Are your sentences and paragraphs well-structured and linked together in a clear, logical way?

Your writing should be easy to read. The less work your reader (examiner) has to do, the better.

Lexical Resource

This is your vocabulary. Do you use a good range of appropriate words, correctly spelt? You will get credit for using more uncommon vocabulary, but this must be completely appropriate in the context. If you are not sure, it is better to use more common words which are correct.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Your grammar and punctuation. Of course you will make some mistakes; the important thing is to try and avoid the basic errors that you *know* are wrong and to avoid any mistakes which make your writing difficult to understand.

In your preparation and practice, therefore, you need to keep these four criteria in mind.

Possible essay structure

A short **introduction** showing you understand what the topic is about (maybe indicating why it is important/relevant) and that there are different opinions on it. You could then indicate what your argument is going to be. You can paraphrase parts of the question, but don't copy any of it word for word.

A paragraph or two focussing on the side of the argument you **don't** agree with.

A paragraph or two giving the **counter-arguments** to the above.

A short **conclusion**.

General tips

Spend a couple of minutes thinking about your answer and writing a short plan. Space is given on the answer sheet for your plan. This will help with the structure of your answer and ensure that you don't forget any good ideas you originally had.

Also give yourself two or three minutes to check your answer when you have finished, particularly your grammar, spelling and sentence structure/punctuation.

Don't use lots of memorised phrases, which may be inappropriate in context. In particular, don't use clichés such as "every coin has two sides" – your examiner has seen these hundreds of times!

Be as careful as possible with your handwriting – you don't want to give the examiner a headache.

It doesn't matter what opinions you give, as long as they are well expressed. You can be as controversial as you like. The important thing is to try and convince the reader that your opinion is correct.

It's OK to use some personal language, but not too much.

Quality is better than quantity – you won't get extra marks for writing more than 250 words.

This is not an academic essay, but your writing should not be too informal (eg, don't use words/phrases such as "lots of", "put up with", "get", "IMHO" etc.)

How to improve your writing

Do lots of reading – anything (as long as it's in English!). With the internet there's absolutely no excuse for not finding something you're interested in. Simply reading will improve your writing, but you could also make notes on how things are expressed or write down new vocabulary (preferably in context). You could also do a more extensive analysis of part of a text. Then try to write in this way yourself and to use the new words you have read.

Take part in online discussion groups etc. Start your own blog, maybe with friends.

Work together with friends and colleagues, reading and commenting on each other's writing.

Always do your homework. Be nice to your teacher and get them to check any practice writing you do.

Common mistakes

No introduction or conclusion (or neither).

Answer not relevant to the question. If you do not answer the question (perhaps by reproducing a memorised irrelevant or vaguely relevant essay) you will fail, even if the English is perfect.

Basic grammar mistakes which you should be able to easily correct yourself (and therefore should avoid in the first place).

Few or no linking words, or these are used incorrectly.

Poor sentence/paragraph structure.

READING TEST GUIDELINES

Format

The reading test consists of three texts of approximately 650 – 850 words each. Each text has 13 or 14 questions, and the total test has 40 questions.

The texts are on topics of general interest, usually taken from journals, books, magazines and newspapers.

Timing

The total time allowed is 60 minutes, so you should allow about 20 minutes for each text. Within the 60 minutes, your answers must be transferred to the answer sheet in the booklet, as there is no extra time allowed for this. Any answers that are not on the answer sheet will not be marked, so please make sure that you put all of your answers onto the answer sheet within the 60 minutes.

Question order

The questions usually follow the order of the text. If they don't, you will see this advice:

These questions/statements do not follow the order of the text.

So, in this case you will need to scan the whole text. Otherwise, you can continue to read from where you found the answer to the previous question.

Question types

A variety of question types is used, including multiple choice, short-answer questions, sentence completion, notes/summary/flow-chart/table completion, classification, matching, choosing suitable paragraph headings from a list, identification of a writer's views/claims (yes/no/not given), and identification of information in the text (true/false/not given).

These questions are varied and designed to test your ability to:

- Understand the main ideas of paragraphs and the main points in the text.
- Find and understand key details.

These are both essential reading skills for university study.

How can I improve my reading skills for the test?

Read lots of general interest texts in English language newspapers and magazines. Try to read actively – for example:

- Write a heading for each paragraph.
- Think of questions that are answered in the paragraphs.
- Write short summaries of the whole text, and sections of the text. When you do this, remember that you don't need to worry about grammar for this particular activity, as you are training your brain to read the texts the same way that you need to read them to succeed in the test.

What tips can you give me for during the test?

Stay calm!

- Don't try to read the whole text in detail - you don't have time for this!
- First, skim read the text (first and last paragraphs, and the first sentence of each of the other paragraphs). This will help you to have an overall understanding of it.
- Look at the questions. Only read the parts of the text that are necessary to answer the questions.
- Watch the time; after about 20 minutes try to move on to the next passage, you can always return to a text if you have time at the end.
- Make sure all of your answers are transferred to the answer sheet.
- Put an answer for all the questions – you don't lose a mark if it's wrong.

What do I do if I don't understand a word?

You will not need, or be expected, to understand every word in the text. If you do need to understand the word, try looking at the information that comes before and after it; you can often help your understanding if you do this.

Example:

There is great prosperity in the country but many citizens are extremely poor.

You might not know the word "prosperity", but if you read on you will see: **but** many citizens are extremely **poor**. 'but' shows that the information contrasts or is surprising, so we might be surprised that there are many poor people in probably a wealthy country. So we can guess that "prosperity" is related to being rich, or wealthy.

LISTENING TEST GUIDELINES

Format

The listening test consists of four sections, each with ten questions. The questions are designed so that the answers appear in order in the listening. You will hear each section once only. Please note that the paper becomes more difficult as you progress through it.

The recording for the first three sections deals with various situations set in an educational or an everyday social context. For example, in each of these sections you may hear the following:

- a conversation between two speakers set in an everyday social context (e.g. conversation in a travel or an accommodation agency etc.)
- a monologue set in an everyday social situation (e.g. speech about local facilities, an audio guide to a university's library etc.)
- a conversation between up to four people (e.g. students discussing an assignment, a radio interview etc.)

In section four, however, you will hear a monologue on an academic subject (e.g. a university lecture).

Timing

The recording lasts for approximately 30 minutes. During this time you need to write your answers on the question paper as you listen. At the end of the test you will be given 10 extra minutes to transfer your answers to an answer sheet. You will be told to put your pens down by the voice-over. You need to take care when transferring answers to an answer sheet as you will be penalised for poor spelling and grammar mistakes (e.g. incorrect spelling, writing answer in a singular instead of plural noun form etc.)

Task types

A variety of questions is used in the listening test. These questions are chosen from the following question types:

- note/table/chart completion,

for example:

Complete the table below. Write one or two words for each answer.

Eco-holidays

	type of holiday	accommodation
Sapa Adventure	watching animals	(1)

- multiple choice, for example:

Choose the correct option, A, B or C.

Steve was put in jail because he

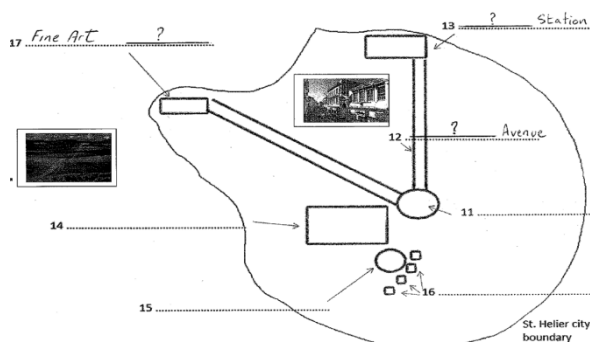
A _____ was outspoken about the environment.

B wanted to kill cats and squirrels.

C cut down some trees.

- labelling a plan/map/diagram, *for example*:

Complete the map below as you listen.



- summary completion, *for example*:

Complete the summary below. Write no more than three words and/or a number.

The reference book (1) _____ by Dr. John Samuels is an excellent source of information regarding structuring a variety of university assignments; pages (2) _____ to 47 in chapter 4 concentrate on report-writing...

- sentence completion, *for example*:

After finishing the first year of her studies, Christine was still greatly impressed with all the (1) of her university.

These questions test your ability to understand:

- the main ideas and factual information
- the opinions and attitudes of speakers
- the development of ideas.

Dealing with your test paper

- You will be given some time to read through the questions before you listen. Try to predict what the speaker will say. Remember that this will require concentration.
- Do not worry if there is a word you do not understand – you may not need to use it.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, try to answer it but do not waste too much time on it – move quickly onto the next question.
- Do not get frustrated if you think the topic is too difficult or the speaker is too fast. Try to relax and tune in.
- Practise reading, writing and listening at the same time.
- You will hear the word(s) you need to use in the recording. You will not need to change the form of the word(s) you hear.
- Pay attention to the word limit. For example, if you are asked to complete a sentence using no more than two words, if the correct answer is 'grey jumper', then don't write 'jumper that is grey'.
- If the question asks you to complete the gap 'in the...' and the correct answer is 'afternoon', then note that you should write 'afternoon' on your answer sheet.

- Attempt all questions. You will not be penalised for answers that are incorrect.
- Always check your answers in the time given to do this.

During the listening test

- Remember to put your name on the question paper and the answer sheet.
- When the recording starts, check that you can hear it. Raise your hand straightaway and let the invigilator know if you cannot hear the recording properly.
- Stay in your seat until the invigilator gives you permission to leave the room.

How to improve your listening

The first thing to do is learn to listen actively – you need to make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that someone is saying but, more importantly, pay attention, and try to understand the complete message behind the words.

Watching films, TV shows or videos is a good start. If you enjoy reading, why not listen to some of your favourite books? Audio books are available in many different formats, and you can even borrow some audio books from libraries.

Films and TV shows are scripted, so listening to talk radio or chat shows can be a bit more challenging. But it's all good practice!

SPEAKING TEST GUIDELINES

Format

The speaking test comprises three parts and lasts for around 12-14 minutes. It is taken individually, with one examiner.

Part 1: you will be asked some general questions about yourself, where you are from, your interests etc. This part lasts 3-4 minutes.

Part 2: you will be given a topic to prepare and talk about. There is 1 minute to think about this and note down some ideas, and then you are expected to talk for around 2 minutes. The topics are fairly general, and at this stage simply ask you to describe something like a holiday, a hotel or an invention.

Part 3: the examiner will ask you some questions to elicit more detailed discussion on the topic. This part should last about 5 minutes.

How your performance is assessed

Fluency and Coherence

This is the ability to speak at length, with as little repetition and hesitation as possible. Your use of connecting words and phrases will also be assessed.

Lexical Resource

The breadth and appropriacy of your vocabulary, and your ability to paraphrase (say something in a different way if you can't think of particular words).

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Your examiner will listen for the range of grammatical structures you are able to use and how accurately and appropriately you do this.

Pronunciation

This refers to your pronunciation of both individual sounds and your intonation. The less effort needed to understand you, the better!

General advice

If the examiner greets you with, for example "Good morning. How are you?" don't just grunt, but respond appropriately. This is part of everyday communication.

Don't give the examiner a present!

Don't memorise long pieces of language (for example, about your city) and try to get all this in, even if it is not entirely appropriate. Your examiner will spot this immediately and ask you another question on a different topic.

If you don't understand a question or an aspect of the topic you are given, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. This is a natural part of communication.

As with the writing test, it doesn't really matter what you say, as long as you say it well!

Don't ask the examiner at the end how you have done or if you have passed. We cannot tell you this; your results will be sent to you by our International Office.

Try to develop your answers as much as possible. The fewer that we have to ask you, the better.

Part 3 gives you the chance to show off a bit and impress your examiner – make sure you take full advantage of it.

Leave the test room quietly – don't start talking loudly to friends outside.

Make sure you have a pen or pencil with you to make notes in Part 2.

We want you to do well! Your examiner will try to make you as relaxed as possible and will encourage you throughout the test. Deep breaths can help with nerves. Just be yourself.

General tips for the test

- Arrive at least 30 minutes before the scheduled examination time.
- Make sure you are prepared and have something to eat and drink beforehand. You will not be allowed to take food into the test room. You will only be allowed to take a drink in a transparent bottle.
- Write your name clearly in English characters. The centre is where you are taking the test.
- There will be no breaks between the listening and the reading tests, so make sure you go to the toilet before the tests start.
- You will be asked to switch your mobile phones and any other electronic devices off. You will be asked to place these with other personal belongings in a location designated by the invigilator.
- Make sure you have the right ID with you. If you arrive with the wrong ID, you will not be allowed to attend the test.
- You can use both pen and pencil to complete the question paper and the answer sheet.
- You can write your answers in lower case or capital letters.
- Be as careful as possible with your handwriting – you don't want to give the examiner a headache.

Good luck!