

Assessing Writing Performance – Level C2

Assessment of Writing in the Cambridge English: Proficiency (Certificate of Proficiency in English – CPE)

Cambridge English writing scripts are marked by trained examiners in a secure online marking environment. The quality assurance of Writing Examiners (WEs) is managed by Team Leaders (TLs) who are in turn responsible to a Principal Examiner (PE). All of the examiners (PEs, TLs and WEs) must prove each year, through a certification process, that they are competent to assess. In addition, they are regularly monitored during live testing sessions.

The Writing Examiners award marks using a Writing Assessment Scale which was developed with explicit reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It covers all the levels of the Cambridge English exams and is divided into four subscales:

- **Content**
 - This focuses on how well the candidate has fulfilled the task, in other words, if they have done what they were asked to do.
- **Communicative Achievement**
 - This focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the task, and whether the candidate has used the appropriate register.
- **Organisation**
 - This focuses on the way the candidate puts together the piece of writing, in other words, if it is logical and ordered.
- **Language**
 - This focuses on vocabulary and grammar. It includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

Examiners use the C2 Level Assessment Scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the Proficiency Writing test.

How can I use the Assessment Scales?

Using the scales yourself while marking students' writing will help you to:

- analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses when they practise C2 writing tasks
- guide your students in how to enhance their performance
- form an impression of how ready your students are to take the writing part of the exam.

The Assessment Scales

The C2 Assessment Scales are divided into six bands from 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Descriptors for each criterion are provided for bands 1, 3 and 5 and indicate what a candidate is expected to demonstrate at each band. The descriptors for band 3 and above indicate performance of at least C2 level.

C2	CONTENT	COMMUNICATIVE ACHIEVEMENT	ORGANISATION	LANGUAGE
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Demonstrates complete command of the conventions of the communicative task. Communicates complex ideas in an effective and convincing way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.	Text is organised impressively and coherently using a wide range of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with complete flexibility.	Uses a wide range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, with fluency, precision, sophistication and style. Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and completely natural. Any inaccuracies occur only as slips.
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>			
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task with sufficient flexibility to communicate complex ideas in an effective way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes.	Text is a well-organised, coherent whole, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with flexibility.	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, effectively and precisely. Uses a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication. Errors, if present, are related to less common words and structures, or occur as slips.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>			
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas, as appropriate.	Text is well-organised and coherent, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect.	Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately. Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility. Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>		

Remember:

The Assessment Scales descriptors are phrased positively (as ‘**can-do**’ statements) at each level. This means that a Band 1 descriptor in the C2 scales will not set out what the text does **not** do; rather it describes a performance in terms of what a candidate can do at CEFR C1 level.

For example, under the Language subscale, the descriptor at Band 1 (C1 level) for grammar – *Uses a **range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility*** – is couched in similar language to the Band 3 descriptor (C2 level), but with key differences - *Uses a **wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms with full control, flexibility and sophistication***. So at C2 level, a wide range of simple and complex forms is expected, used with full control and flexibility and with sophistication. At Band 5 (above basic C2 level), a writer’s *Use of grammar is sophisticated, fully controlled and **completely natural***.

Similarly, under the Organisation subscale, a key difference between the Band 1 (C1 level) and Band 3 (C2 level) descriptors is that whereas at Band 1 *Text is **well-organised and coherent**, using a **variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect***, at Band 3 *Text is a well-organised, coherent **whole**, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns **with flexibility***. The successful weaving of the devices and organisational patterns into a coherent whole text is important here, and the use of the devices and patterns must be flexible. At Band 5 (above basic C2 level) *Text is organised **impressively** and coherently using a wide range of cohesive devices and organisational patterns with **complete** flexibility*.

Don’t worry if a lot of the terms used in the scales are new to you – in Appendix A (and also in the Handbook for Teachers for Cambridge English Proficiency) you will find a Glossary of Terms for Writing, where the terminology used in the scales is explained, and examples are given. For instance, under the Language subscale, there are examples of **simple** and **complex grammatical forms** and an explanation of what is meant by **grammatical control** and **range**. **Flexibility** is explained under the General terms section. The Language subscale also includes vocabulary, and the idea of **less common lexis** is explained, as well as the concept of **appropriacy** of vocabulary. Under the Organisation subscale, there are examples of **cohesive devices**, as well as an explanation of what is meant by **organisational patterns** (expected in a candidate’s writing at all bands at this level). The adverb **generally** is also explained under the General terms section: it is a qualifier meaning ‘not in every way or instance’. Looking at how these terms and distinctions are applied to the sample scripts in this guide (and those in the Handbook for Teachers for Cambridge English Proficiency) will help you to develop a sensitivity to the language of the Assessment Scales and to encourage your students to improve their writing performance.

It is well worth spending some time looking through the glossary of terms and becoming familiar with the terms used, as well as referring to them constantly when marking your students’ work, as the Cambridge English examiners do.