

Writing guide

A formal/semi-formal letter/email

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm writing in response to your advertisement for 'The Journey of a Lifetime' in the June edition of the Student Gazette newspaper.

I have just finished my studies at school and have a place at University. Before I start my degree in Business Studies and then pursue a career, I would like to take a gap year in order to increase my experience of the world.

My interests include mountain biking and sailing. This year at school I was involved in raising money for a local children's charity and I was also responsible for helping to organise the school drama festival.

I enjoy meeting people and I feel being involved in one of your gap year projects could help me to improve my communication and teamwork skills.

I would be grateful if you could send me information about your organisation and details of how to apply.

Yours faithfully,
Becky Raven.

Formal expressions

Opening salutation

Dear Sir or Madam
Dear Mr Rylands
Dear Martin

Closing salutation

Yours faithfully
Yours sincerely/Best regards
Best wishes

Reason for writing

I am writing | *to...(request/complain about/inform...)*
in response to...
in connection to...

Referring to previous contact

Thank you for your letter/email...
With regard | *to your letter dated...*
Further

Give good/bad news

I would be delighted to...
We would be happy to...
Unfortunately...

Refer to future contact

I look forward to hearing from you.
If you | *have any further questions* | *please do not hesitate to contact me.*
require any further information,

Extra Writing Practice

Write an answer to this question. Write your answer in 120–180 words in an appropriate style.

You have seen an advertisement on your school notice board to have a pen friend in the United Kingdom with the chance to stay in England for a week in the summer. In return your pen friend would also visit you. Write a letter to introduce yourself for the first time. Begin your letter *Dear Pen Friend...*

A less formal letter/email

Hi Maria

I'm really sorry about last week. I was really ill so I had to cancel my own party. Anyway, this is just to let you know that I'm now having my birthday party next Saturday. So the good news is that I can invite you again! Would you like to come?

I can't hire the local hall so it will be at my house. It starts at 7 and there'll be about 20 people there. You can get to my house on the number 60 bus. Ask the driver to stop on Insley Road. We're at number 76.

By the way thanks for the birthday present you sent. The shirt was a great fit! I'll wear it at the party. Look forward to seeing you on Saturday.

Best wishes

Ritchie.

Less formal or informal expressions

Give reason for writing

Just to let you know that...
I'm emailing you to...

Apologise

I really sorry but...
I'm afraid that...

Offer/Request

Would you like to...?
Can I...?/Could you...?
Would you mind if...?

Recommend and suggest

You should/ought to...
Why don't you...?
How about...?

Give good news/bad news

I'm so happy because...
The good/bad news is that...
Unfortunately...

Say when and where/Give details

There is/are...
It's at/starts at...
You can get there by....

Thank

Thanks for...
I'm really grateful for...

End

Look forward to seeing you./See you soon.
Bye for now.
All the best/Best wishes.

Extra Writing Practice

Imagine you are Maria in the email from Ritchie above. Write a reply (120–150 words.)

- Apologise that you cannot come to the party.
- Explain why not.
- Suggest meeting for lunch/Say when/Recommend somewhere.

A review

Introduce your subject for review.

My favourite film of the last few months was 'Casino Royale'. It's the latest James Bond film but it's very different from previous films.

The first thing you notice about the film is that Bond is younger and more aggressive. The female character is also a spy and more than the usual 'Bond girl'. In addition, it's worth seeing because it's much more realistic.

Review some of the positive points.

Mention some weaker points.

One problem with the film is that it happens in lots of locations and the plot is a bit too complicated. It also needs to be about 30 minutes shorter. Nevertheless, the scenes in the Casino have lots of tension and the criminal characters are particularly evil and interesting.

So overall I'd recommend the film as it's a new kind of Bond movie and not the usual predictable mix of fancy cars and stupid gadgets. It's certainly a good choice if you want to watch a DVD next Friday night.

Conclude with your overall opinion.

Useful expressions

Introducing your review

The aim/purpose of this review is to...

My favourite... is...

The first thing you notice is...

Describing positive feature

One thing I really like about it is...

It's worth seeing because...

A really good part is when...

Describing weaknesses

One problem is...

It isn't very...

One thing that could be improved is...

It also needs more...

Final comments

Overall, I (strongly) recommend...

It's certainly a good...

(Nevertheless) it's much better than...

Extra Writing Practice

You recently saw this notice in an English-language magazine called **Cinema World**.

Tell us about your favourite film of the year!

What was your favourite film of the last few months? Write us a review of the film you saw (120–180 words.) Include information on the characters, the style of the film and explain why you liked it so much. The best reviews will be published next month.

A short story

Carl's family had an important reason for leaving the house at two in the morning, and so everyone had gone to bed early. In fact Carl had been so excited about flying for the first time he could hardly sleep. When he managed to, he dreamt he saw his mother, the twins and himself all running down the airport runway chasing the plane as it took off. He was screaming, 'Wait! Wait!' Suddenly, he woke to a voice saying, 'Wake up Carl. Get dressed! We're late!'

After a one-hour journey down the motorway they finally arrived at the airport. 'Your flight is boarding now,' said the person at check-in. 'If you run you might catch it.' As they ran through the airport and reached the gate the plane was moving off. Carl shouted to his family, 'Quick, follow me!' He raced ahead out onto the runway. 'Wait! Wait!' he shouted.

Just then, he woke. Carl's alarm clock was ringing and his mother smiled at him. 'It's time to get up Carl. We don't want to miss the plane.'

Useful expressions

Background and atmosphere

It was raining with flashes of lightning outside...
The house was quiet and I sat all alone...
It all began on a day when I had been...
We were very tired and had been travelling all day...

Contrasting time and events

After...
As soon as I...
By the time...

At the same time...
While I was...-ing, they were...
Meanwhile...
A second later...

The climax/ending

Just then...
In the end...
Eventually...
Finally, I realised...
That was the last time I'd ever...

Extra Writing Practice

Your teacher has asked you to write a story (120–180 words) for an international magazine. The story must begin with the following words: *Rachel's family had an important reason for waking up early that morning and her mother had set the alarm clock for 5am.*

A report

Always include a title to explain the purpose. You could also say who the report is for.

To: The Principal of the School
From: Class 5
Subject: Ideas for the school 'eco-day'

The aim of this report is to present Class 5's ideas for events at the school during 'eco-week'.

Sub-headings are a good idea and help the reader.

State the purpose of the report.

Poster competition

Our first idea is to run a poster competition. Each student could design a poster about the environment. For example, it might show how to recycle or suggest switching the standby switch off on the TV.

Give examples to help explain.

Contrast and add information where necessary.

No cars

We could ask all students to walk or cycle to school during the week. The only problem would be that some students live too far from the school. However, they could ask their parents to share car journeys with others and save petrol.

Display

Our final plan is to have a display in the main hall of all the objects you can recycle. For example, we could show how plastic bottles can be made into coats.

To sum up, everyone was very enthusiastic about the 'eco-week'. Next we would like to advertise the events during the week by sending a letter to all teachers to give to their students.

Don't forget to summarise. You might also want to say what needs to happen as a result of the report.

Useful expressions

Introducing the report/Stating the purpose

The following reports outlines...
The aim of this report is to...
The report is based on...

Introducing ideas

The first/Another idea is to...
One possibility is to...
Our final idea/plan/suggestion is to...

Proposing and suggesting

We should/could...
We would like to...
If possible, we...
It might be a good idea to...
One suggestion is to...

Giving reasons/Recommending

As result of...we think...
This is a good idea because...
We recommend this because...

Contrasting and alternatives

On the one hand...on the other...
One problem is.../However...
In contrast...

Generalising

In general...
On the whole...

Concluding and summing up

In conclusion...
To sum up...
Our final recommendation is that...

Extra Writing Practice

Write an answer to this question. Write your answer in 120–180 words in an appropriate style.

There is a problem with parking at your place of work (or study.) There is not enough room for cars. You recently attended a meeting with a group of people to discuss ways to solve the problem.

Write a report on the meeting. Describe the best ideas and propose a solution.

An article

Give it a title

THREE WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY AROUND THE HOME

In a time when the world is trying to save its natural resources, it's easy for many of us to help by using less energy in our houses.

Introduce the subject by restating the question

Use clear paragraphs for each part of your article.

Take, for example, standby switches on TVs. Many people don't realise that when you aren't watching it, you might still be using electricity. All you have to do is switch it off at the plug when you go to bed and you've already reduced your electricity bill.

A second way to use less energy is to fit special light bulbs which last longer than normal light bulbs and use less energy. They cost a little more but in the long run, they save you money.

Finally, put a sweater on! When it gets cold, many people turn up the heating. But if they just put a sweater on they would quickly get warmer without using fuel.

Don't forget a conclusion. Sometimes you can include a message to the reader.

So next time you are about to switch it on or turn it up, ask yourself if you really need to and save yourself some money at the same time!

Extra Writing Practice

Write an answer to this question.

We are looking for an article (120–180 words) that suggests three ways to improve the local community. Explain why this is an important issue and suggest three ideas to help. The winning article will receive a £50 book token!

An opinion essay

Read the student's answer to the following exam question.

Write an article and give your opinion on the following statement: 'It's important that young people should learn to earn money early on in life rather than being given pocket money.'

From the moment we leave school to the time we retire, most of us will have to work in order to earn money during our life. So the question is whether we should have to work before this time as children or wait until we become adults.

In my opinion, children should have to earn pocket money. By that I don't mean that they should have full-time jobs but that there are plenty of things they can do around the house such as the washing-up or gardening.

In addition to helping at home, working for money gives children a greater sense responsibility. What's more, parents who simply give children money are not preparing them for the adult world. You could also argue that when children earn their money, when they buy something it will mean so much more.

So, to sum up, I believe that children learn from the experience of earning money and find out that nothing in life is for free.

Useful expressions

Introduction

Some people claim/believe/say
It is sometimes said that...
The question is...
We often read/hear that...

Stating your opinion

In my opinion,
As I see it,
From my point of view...

Making extra points

What's more...
In addition...
Furthermore...

Introducing a contradictory point

Although/Even though...
Despite + noun/gerund/
Despite the fact that...
However...

Contrasting views for and against

On the one hand/side...on the other
While it's true that...
You could also argue that...
Nevertheless,.../
However,...
One advantage/
Another disadvantage is that...
Even though...

Concluding

On balance...
I feel/believe that..
In my opinion...
Summarising...
To sum up, in conclusion,...

Extra Writing Practice

Write an essay (120–180 words) giving your opinion on the following statement: 'Young people are spending too much time in front of screens (TV, computer) and have stopped learning what "real life" looks like.'

A 'for and against' essay

There are two ways to structure a 'for and against' essay. You can either contrast an argument for and against in each paragraph OR give all the arguments for in one paragraph and then all the arguments against in the next paragraph. Notice how these two answers for the same FCE question are structured:

Some people believe that learning a language is one of the most useful subjects at school and should be compulsory for all pupils. State the arguments for and against this view.

Version 1

For many children, school is the obvious place to learn another language. However, there are so many other important subjects such as mathematics or history that not all pupils have enough time to study everything.

Restate the question in the introduction.

Contrast an argument for and against in each paragraph.

One argument for making language lessons compulsory is that more and more professions need people with language skills. So schools need to prepare children for their future careers. On the other hand not everyone will have an 'international job' so it might never be useful to them.

It's also true that learning a language introduces you to other cultures and helps your understanding of other people. Nevertheless, many other subjects such as geography also provide knowledge of the world.

Some people also argue that learning a language helps young children become more intelligent and helps them learn other subjects. However, if you teach children another language too early, it may also confuse them.

Conclude with your own overall opinion.

So, to sum up, I believe that learning another language at school is important for a child and will give them an advantage later in life as well as being more enjoyable than many other subjects.

Version 2

Restate the question in the introduction.

For many children, school is the obvious place to learn another language. However, there are so many other important subjects such as mathematics or history that not pupils have enough time to study everything.

Use paragraph three to state two to three arguments against.

One argument for making language lessons compulsory is that a child's future profession may need language skills. Another reason is that learning a language introduces you to other cultures and helps your understanding of other people. Thirdly, some people believe that it helps young children become more intelligent.

On the other hand we also have to remember that not everyone will have an 'international job' so language learning might never be useful to them. In addition to that, there are many other subjects such as geography which also provide knowledge of the world. Finally, some people believe that it may nit be good for children to learn another language too early in life.

Use paragraph two to state two to three arguments for.

So, on balance, I believe that learning another language at school is important for a child and will give them an advantage later in life as well as being more enjoyable than many other subjects.

Conclude with your own overall opinion.

Useful expressions

Giving arguments for...

On the one hand...
You could argue that...
While it is true that...
I agree that...

Giving arguments against...

On the other hand...
An argument against this is...
However...
One disadvantage is that...
Nevertheless...

General expressions

Another reason for/against...
First, secondly, thirdly...
In addition...
Finally...

Conclude

So, on balance, I believe that...
In my opinion,...
To sum up, I feel that...

Extra Writing Practice

Some people believe that many children spend too much time on the Internet and playing computer games.

Write an essay (120–180 words) stating the arguments for and against this view.