

OCR GCSE English Language

Exam Practice: Paper 1

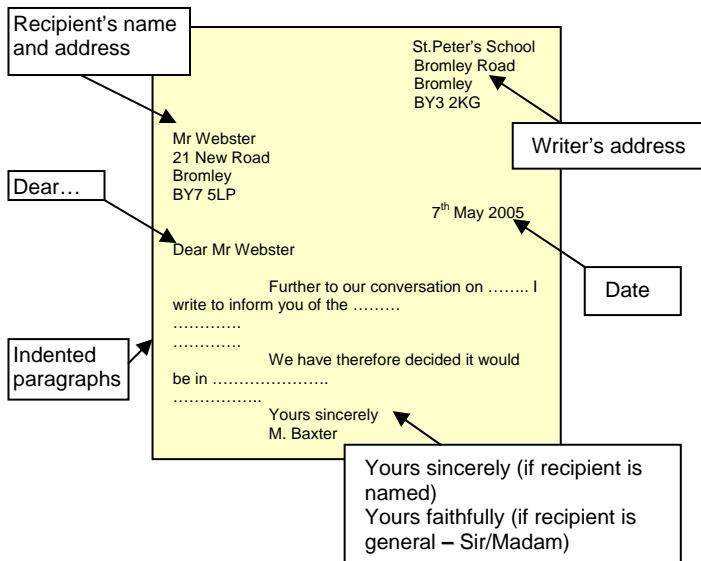
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Formats

Letters

Letters can be either formal business letters or informal personal letters.



This is how you would set out a business letter, although you can also place the recipient's name and address parallel with the sender's address.

The difference between an informal, personal letter and this more formal, business letter is the inclusion of the recipient's name and address.

- In a personal letter you only include your address in the right-hand corner and the date below it before you start the letter.

Choice of format depends on purpose and audience. In the question on page 15, the letter is to parents and is therefore formal.

You would lay it out as a business letter. However, because in this case you have been asked to write a general letter to lots of parents, writing their names and addresses would be difficult, so leave this out. If the letter is to an individual or company, include their name and address if you know them.

Although in the exam you are being tested on the content not the format of your letter, it is better to lay it out correctly.

Once you have done this you need to consider the letter's language and tone, which are very important. In a formal letter you need to use a formal **register**, so let's look at registers.

Register is the language used appropriate to situation and audience. For example if you were telling a friend about an incident at school, you would use a different register from the one you would use when reporting the incident to the head teacher or the police. For the latter, you would use less slang, more Standard English and more precise vocabulary.

Tone is also important. This is an informative letter so the tone is serious.

Articles

Articles in newspapers and magazines are generally written in columns. As with any piece of writing, purpose and audience are important.

It is quite common for an exam paper to ask you to write a magazine article, so be prepared. Remember that if you are writing for your school magazine the register and tone will be different from a magazine article for an adult audience.

You are less likely to be asked to write a newspaper article, but it could happen.

Top tips for newspaper articles

- Be aware of your audience: know whether you're writing for a tabloid or a broadsheet.
- Try to give an idea of the appropriate layout so you could write in columns.
- Indicate where photos might go and write a **caption** but don't waste time drawing.
- Give a brief outline of the story in your first paragraph.
- Remember to include **what** happened, **where**, **when**, **why**, and to **whom**.
- Use quotations from people which will be written in **direct speech**.
- Use a lively style for a tabloid and a more serious style for a broadsheet.
- Sum up in your final paragraph.

Leaflets

You have probably seen enough of these to know how they are laid out. They are written in columns and are often colourful. Most often they are promotional, although they can be informative. Like tabloid newspapers, they have sub-headings and easily digestible paragraphs, sometimes bullet points or tables to summarise information. You are less likely to be asked to write a leaflet but just in case make sure you know how to write one.

Reports

Reports are formal documents which convey information about an event or issue, so you need to adopt a formal register and cover key points. Depending on the type of report you might place the date and location of the incident at the start of the report. For a report you would provide details and adopt a distant voice. *The houses are located in ... Several inhabitants ... Findings indicate that ... Upon further enquiry/ examination it was found that ... It was clear/ evident that ...* And so on.

Descriptive writing

Descriptive writing is more open and creative than informative or explanatory writing.

However, there are different types of description that you may be asked to write. You may get a question such as:

Describe a crossroads in your life and explain how it has affected you.

In this case the description is **metaphorical**. You would need to think about what crossroads means and how this applies to you – have you ever made a choice that affected your life or experienced something that has changed things for you? Describing such an occurrence would involve setting a scene, providing details about events and, as the question requires it, explaining the effects on you in terms of emotions and thoughts.

Another description might be a more straightforward description of a scene, for example a city at night. Here, reference to senses is helpful. As with any piece of writing, remember to vary your vocabulary and sentence structures so don't use words like 'nice' and 'good' or start all your sentences with 'The ...'. Try to show the examiner that you have good control over language by using a range of vocabulary, sentences and punctuation.

Do you know how to start a sentence with a participle phrase?

Knowing how will help you to vary your sentences. Let's look at this example:

She entered the room and spotted him in the corner. What was he doing here?

This could become:

Entering the room, she spotted him in the corner. What was he doing here?

- The participle phrase is in italics. Not only does it help you to vary your sentence start but it also sounds more immediate, as if there was no time between entering and seeing the man in the corner.
- If you use participle phrases, make sure that the word after the phrase is the subject of the sentence – the thing or person doing something. In this case the subject has been underlined for you. She is the one entering the room, so she is placed after the participle phrase and comma.

You don't want to write something like:

✗ *Walking round the corner, the road became uneven.*

This is wrong because it makes it sound like the road is walking!

✓ *Walking round the corner, I saw that the road became uneven.*

Activity 4b: Descriptive writing

What words in the passage below are particularly effective and why?

A shutter flew open. A gust exhaled into the room. Suddenly everything – books, papers, chairs, clothes – took on life and danced in the unseen torrent. And a shoe soared in through the opening hurtling to a stop at the blackboard. (*Small Island* by Andrea Levy)

Find alternatives for:

think, stop, anger, arrange, venue, buy, children, examine, inspect, rich, dawn, large, small, happy, afraid, homeless, empty, colour, sleep.