

Essay Writing B2/C1
Student Workbook

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Contents

1. **Session I : Basic Guidelines concerning the Structure and Content of the ‘Classical’ Essay**
 - (a) General Principles: useful hints; points to watch
 - (b) Structure: essay structure: the classical five paragraph essay
 - (c) Content/Style: features that make a good essay
 - (d) Book Review Assignment

2. **Session II: Practice Essay 1** (*See Teachers’ Booklet for Essay Examination Titles*)
3. **Session III: Feedback**
 - (a) (Shorter Writing Tasks)
4. **Session IV: Comma Usage**
 - (a) Simplified Rules for the Use of the Comma (b) Detailed Rules for the Use of the Comma (OWL Purdue University Free Copyright) (c) Comma Exercises
5. **Session V: The Use of the Apostrophe (OWL)**
 - (a) Detailed Rules for the Use of the Apostrophe (b) Apostrophe Exercises
6. **Session VI: Vocabulary Building Exercises**
 - (a) Writing a Narrative (b) Describing People (c) Character Descriptions
 - (d) Conjunction/Connectives (e) Extended Vocabulary Exercise
7. **Session VII: Practice Essay 2** (*See Teachers’ Booklet for Essay Titles*)
8. **Session VIII: Feedback (Shorter Writing Tasks)**
 - (a) (Shorter Writing Tasks)
9. **Session IX: Summaries**
 - (a) Five Points to Note When Writing a Summary (b) Summary Exercise 1: Elementary (c) Summary Exercise 2: Advanced
10. **Register:**
 - a) Introductory Examples: three film reviews with the same content, but written at three distinct registers: colloquial, formal and literary.
 - b) Exercises

11. **Session XI: Final Test**
12. **Session XII: Return of Tests**

Session I: Essay Writing: 10 Points to Watch

1. **Plan** your essay structure beforehand: (a) by listing the points you want to make in your preparation on a sheet of 'rough' paper (b) by producing counterarguments and (c) by arranging your points thematically into three paragraphs for the body of the essay.
2. Use the **five-paragraph structure** (Introduction (1), body (3) and conclusion (1)). This applies not only to shorter essays (300-1,000 words) in examination conditions but also to some pragmatic tasks such as speeches.
3. **Introduction.** You may refer to the question, but do not quote the essay title in full although you may refer to the title by quoting no more than a couple of phrases. State a clear thesis or intended argumentation by mentioning three aspects, corresponding to the three paragraphs in the body of the essay.
4. Keep the **paragraphs** clearly defined and consistent. Do not have 'half' paragraphs. (It is a good idea to have a full line space between the five paragraphs so that the structure is 'transparent'.)
5. Try to keep a clear thread based on your main argument throughout the essay. Your essay should have **clear argumentation**, which strongly supports your stance whilst at the same time dealing fairly with counterarguments.
6. Have a clear **conclusion**, which does not merely reiterate the points made in the introduction, but which makes a statement of wider scope. In your conclusion, use phrases such as 'In conclusion, it has been shown that ...'. Do not end your essay with an inconclusive conclusion such as 'the internet has provided the world with many advantages, but also an equal number of disadvantages.'
7. **Avoid contractions** such as *wasn't*; *it's* and *mustn't*. (This usage is, however, now accepted by many examiners, but it is still better to avoid these forms in order to give your essay greater formality and thus, authority.)
8. Do not begin your sentences with the co-ordinating conjunction **BUT**. Even though many quality newspaper articles do this, academic and scientific conventions still prefer the use of 'however' and other contrastive connectives for beginning a sentence. (The co-ordinating conjunction *but* is normally preceded by a comma except for the conjunctive formulation *not only . . . but also*.)
9. Except for phrasal verbs such as *to get up*, **avoid the verb to get** by using verbs such as *to receive*, *to obtain* and *to acquire* and also, except for standard collocations such as *to get dressed*, do not use the verb *get* to form the passive: NOT: Bill GOT helped by his brother; BUT: Bill WAS helped by his brother.
10. Many words in English have many different meanings (polysemy); use your dictionaries to check **the exact meaning**.

Summary: The Classical Five Paragraph Essay

The five paragraph essay follows a defined format. The first paragraph **introduces** us to the thesis of the essay and directs us to the three main supporting subtopics. The second, third and fourth paragraphs form the **BODY** of the essay and the final paragraph states the **CONCLUSION**.

The **introductory paragraph** not only introduces the reader to the topic but also states a clear stance to be argued in three paragraphs and so three basic aspects should be mentioned in this paragraph.

The **body** of the essay should contain three paragraphs for B1-C2 essays. The first subtopic paragraph should summarise the main arguments in favour of the thesis whereas the second paragraph should refute, or at least qualify the main counterarguments. The third subtopic paragraph depends very much on the question set, but could be summarised under the heading 'any other aspects' of each of the body paragraphs is again supported by three or more supporting sentences.

Finally, the fifth paragraph is more than a summary. It should follow as a logical consequence from the argued case, but should make a point which has a wider scope.

Stylistic Features that make a good essay

(i) Clarity. Each sentence should make a clear point and then be illustrated by a concrete example.

(ii) Succinctness. The language should be concise and precise. As already mentioned, express as much as possible in as few words as possible. This is the aim which can only be attained by essay practice and improvement of vocabulary. For example, the circumlocutory sentence: *Janet was a real chatterbox who couldn't stop talking whereas Jane said so little that it was almost rude at times* can be expressed more succinctly as *Janet was too loquacious whereas Janet was irritatingly taciturn*.

(iii) Register. Both B1/2 and C1/2 essays should avoid a colloquial register:

Avoid	Replace with
GET	Depending on meaning or context: <i>obtain, acquire; become; the verb to be in passive constructions.</i>
THINGS; STUFF	<i>Items, objects, aspects, examples, materials</i>
FACTS	Only to be used with reference to established facts and often confused with lexical items such as <i>factors, aspects</i> or <i>situations</i> .

Use more precise vocabulary. (To achieve this aim, it is important to read essays by established writers. Classical examples include George Orwell, Bertrand Russell and G. K. Chesterton who all write with clarity, precision and humour.)

Your writing should manifest careful, reflective thinking carried out in an imaginative and critical frame of mind. Probe the issue at hand so as to stretch yourself intellectually. It is better to delve deeply into one aspect of a problem than to address several aspects superficially.

(iv) Organisation. Try to order the expression of your thoughts in such a way that they build upon what comes before and support what comes after so that nothing irrelevant to the matter at hand remains to interrupt the flow. Ensure that it always is clear to the reader just what the current point is and how it relates to what you've done and are about to do.

(v) Argument. This is the most central feature of an English essay. Try to satisfy yourself that you have succeeded in showing that everyone ought to believe what you in fact do believe (and where you do not feel satisfied, say so, and try to indicate why). To accomplish this, always establish your points by providing good reasons—the most relevant and persuasive ones you can think of, structured as rigorously and incisively as you can—in support of your views.

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