

## Assessing Writing Performance – Level A2

### Examiners and writing assessment in the A2 Key for Schools exams

Cambridge Assessment 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 three 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.
- **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 A2 Level assessment scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the A2 Key for Schools Writing test.

### How can I use the assessment scales?

Examiners use the A2 Level assessment scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the A2 Key for Schools Writing test. Using the scales yourself during classroom writing practice tasks will help you to:

- analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses when they do A2 Key for Schools Writing tasks
- form an impression of how ready your students are to take the Writing part of the exam.

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### The assessment scales

The A2 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. A2 Key for Schools is at Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the descriptors for band 3 and above generally indicate performance of at least A2 level.

#### Assessment of Writing scale

Band	Content	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis.  Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control.  While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
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.	Text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words.	Uses basic vocabulary reasonably appropriately.  Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control.  Errors may impede meaning at times.
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.	Production unlikely to be connected, though punctuation and simple connectors (i.e. 'and') may on occasion be used.	Produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases.  Produces few simple grammatical forms with only limited control.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>	

As you look through the scales, it may help to highlight words which make one band different from another.

For example, under the *Language* subscale, the descriptor at Band 1 (below A2 level) states: *Produces **few simple** grammatical forms with only limited control.* The Band 3 descriptor (A2 level), uses similar language but with key differences: *Uses simple grammatical forms with **some** degree of control,* so at A2 level, simple forms are expected, used with *some* degree of control.

At Band 5 (B1 level), a writer *Uses simple grammatical forms with a **good** degree of control.*

## How can I use the assessment scales?

You could:

1. Refer to the scales as you mark students' written work in general, especially when they have attempted an A2 Key for Schools writing task.
2. Note down examples of your students' performance in terms of the listed criteria, e.g. Organisation: Text is connected - good use of linking words.
3. Give students feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, linking it to the assessment criteria, e.g. Try using a range of linking words, Good use of linking words, Try and use a range of words – try not to repeat the same words.
4. Think about whether your students are ready for the exam and how they could improve. You could get them to complete a task from the sample paper, setting a time limit, and then mark it using the assessment scales.

As teachers are not trained in the use of these assessment scales, as examiners are, it can be difficult to feel confident in using them the right way. The following activity is designed to help you get started by practising using them to analyse some sample writing tasks.

The activity is based on some sample answers from A2 Key for Schools writing tasks.

Sample task 1: A2 Key for Schools Part 6

Sample task 2: A2 Key for Schools Part 7

The tasks for each of these scripts and further information can be found in the Appendices, of the relevant Handbook for teachers.

### Activity 1

- 1 Make a copy of the blank assessment sheet on pages 5 and 6. You will see that statements from the assessment scales have been turned into questions.
- 2 Read the A2 Key for Schools Writing Part 6 task (see Appendix I).
- 3 Read **Sample Script 1** (see Appendix II). Note down your comments and examples of good and not so good elements of the candidate's writing for each of the questions in the boxes on the assessment sheet. Make sure that while you are doing this you constantly refer to the A2 assessment scale.
- 4 Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on pages 7 and 8.
- 5 Repeat stages 1–4 for the Part 7 sample script, a completed example is on pages 9 and 10.
- 6 When you feel comfortable with using the assessment scale, continue to use the blank assessment sheet when assessing your own students' writing and use this to give them feedback on what aspects of the scales they need to work on to improve.

**Remember:**

- Being able to refer to the assessment scales will help you to analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses and to estimate whether they are ready for the writing part of the exam. However, it won't necessarily give you an accurate prediction of the marks that your students will achieve in a real writing paper, as the candidate may be affected by other factors such as nervousness.

## Assessing Writing Performance Level A2

A2 Key for Schools CONTENT	
Task Number:	
Is all content relevant to the task?	
Good	Not so good
Is the target reader fully informed?	
Good	Not so good
Content mark:	

ORGANISATION	
Is the text connected and coherent?	
Good	Not so good
Does the writer use basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices?	
Good	Not so good
Organisation mark:	

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A2 Key for Schools LANGUAGE	
Does the writer use everyday vocabulary generally appropriately?	
Good	Not so good
Does the writer use simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control?	
Good	Not so good
How far can meaning be determined despite errors?	
Non-impeding errors	Impeding errors
Language mark:	
Comments	

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A2 Key for Schools CONTENT	
Task Number: PART 6	
Is all content relevant to the task?	
Good The content of the message is relevant to the task.	Not so good
Is the target reader fully informed?	
Good All three elements of the message are clearly communicated.	Not so good
Content mark: 5	

ORGANISATION	
Is the text connected and coherent?	
Good The text is coherent	Not so good
Does the writer use basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices?	
Good <i>because, then, it</i>	Not so good
Organisation mark: 5	

A2 Key for Schools LANGUAGE	
Does the writer use everyday vocabulary generally appropriately?	
<p>Good</p> <p><i>new football boots</i> <i>meet</i> <i>your house</i> <i>take a bus</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p>
Does the writer use simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control?	
<p>Good</p> <p><i>I want to buy</i> <i>We can meet at your house at 11:00</i> <i>Is it OK for you?</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p><i>to going shopping tomorrow</i> <i>Then we take a bus</i></p>
How far can meaning be determined despite errors?	
<p>Non-impeding errors</p> <p><i>to going shopping tomorrow</i> (candidate should have written – <i>to go shopping</i>) <i>then we take a bus</i> (candidate should have written – <i>Then we'll take the bus/Then we can take the bus.</i>)</p>	<p>Impeding errors</p>
Language mark: 5	
<p>Comments</p> <p>Very good attempt at the task.</p>	

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A2 Key for Schools CONTENT	
Task Number: PART 7	
Is all content relevant to the task?	
Good	Not so good  The first picture is not mentioned in the text.
Is the target reader fully informed?	
Good  The story is mainly communicated clearly. The reader is on the whole informed.	Not so good
Content mark: 3	

ORGANISATION	
Is the text connected and coherent?	
Good  The text is connected	Not so good
Does the writer use basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices?	
Good  <i>and, so</i>	Not so good
Organisation mark: 3	

A2 Key for Schools LANGUAGE	
Does the writer use everyday vocabulary generally appropriately?	
<p>Good</p> <p><i>sit by a lake</i> <i>food</i> <i>kids</i> <i>swim</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p><i>two of people</i></p>
Does the writer use simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control?	
<p>Good</p> <p><i>They ate food</i> <i>drank drinks</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p><i>they went to home</i> <i>Kids going to home</i> <i>Parents was sawing their kids</i></p>
How far can meaning be determined despite errors?	
<p>Non-impeding errors</p> <p><i>two of people</i> (candidate should have written – <i>two of the family</i>) <i>went to a picnic</i> – (candidate should have written - <i>went on a picnic</i>)</p>	<p>Impeding errors</p>
Language mark: 3	
<p>Comments</p> <p>Satisfactory attempt at the task.</p>	

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## Appendix I

### Sample writing tasks

### A2 Key for Schools

#### Part 6

##### Question 31

You are going shopping with your English friend Pat tomorrow.

Write an email to Pat.

Say:

- where you want to meet
- what time you want to meet
- what you want to buy

Write **25 words** or more

### A2 Key for Schools

#### Part 7

##### Question 32

Look at the three pictures.

Write the story shown in the pictures.

Write **35 words** or more.



**Assessing writing performance Level A2****Appendix II****Sample scripts****A2 Key for Schools – Part 6**Candidate A

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Hi Pat,

I am so happy to going shopping tomorrow because I want to buy new football boots. We can meet at your house at 11:00. Is it OK for you? Then we take a bus.

**A2 Key for Schools – Part 7**Candidate C

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Four people went to a picnic and they sit by a lake. They ate food and drank drinks. Two of people are kids. Kids going to swim so Parents was sawing their kids. Then they went to home.