

TEACHERS' GUIDE TO ASSESSING GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

B2 WRITING

Accuracy and range of grammar

What do we mean by “Accuracy and range of grammar”?

Range, accuracy and appropriacy. *Please note: A candidate is not necessarily given the highest mark for a piece of writing that has no or very few grammatical mistakes in it as the other defining component of this criterion is range. In other words, even if the composition is grammatically accurate, the candidate will be awarded a lower mark if range is limited. (Find ‘grammar examples at B2 level’ below.)*

CEFR descriptor for Grammar at B2 level

“Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstandings.”

LanguageCert assessment criteria for Grammar at B2 level

Mark	Accuracy and range of grammar
3	Good range of grammar appropriate to B2 used with clarity, assurance and precision. Errors occur when language above level used/attempted.
2	Adequate range of B2 grammar used with no impeding errors.
1	Range of grammar too limited (below that expected at B2) AND/OR Many errors not expected at B2. AND/OR Some impeding errors.
0	Range of grammar severely limited. AND/OR Many impeding errors that make the text difficult to follow.

A few examples of expected grammar at B2 level

- Sentence structure: defining and non-defining relative clauses
- Verb tenses: present perfect simple and continuous, past perfect, ‘used to’
- Verb forms: passive; zero, 1st, 2nd, 3rd conditional; causative use of ‘have’ and ‘get’; reported speech with a range of tenses
- Modals: ought to, must / can’t (deduction), ‘would rather’

What to avoid?

- Leaving very basic grammatical mistakes (e.g. subject/verb agreements) in the composition resulting from inattention. Proofreading the text can help candidates detect and correct such errors.
- Restricting yourself to very basic grammatical structures with the aim of making no mistakes. At B2 level, the use of a relatively wide range of structures, tenses and verb forms is required.
- Being inconsistent concerning verb tenses. E.g. when narrating a story, candidates must make sure they choose the appropriate verb tenses.
- Overcomplicating sentences, i.e. writing sentences consisting of more than three clauses.
- Using contractions and abbreviations in formal texts.

Accuracy and range of vocabulary

What do we mean by “Accuracy and range of vocabulary”?

Range, accuracy and appropriacy of vocabulary and spelling. *Please note: A candidate is not necessarily given the highest mark for a piece of writing that has no vocabulary mistakes in it as the other defining component of this criterion is range. In other words, even if the composition is accurate, the candidate will be awarded a lower mark if its vocabulary range is limited. (Find ‘vocabulary examples at B2 level’ below.)*

CEFR descriptor for Vocabulary at B2 level

“Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions and express viewpoints on most general topics, using some complex sentence forms to do so. However, language lacks expressiveness and idiomatic expressions and use of more complex forms is still stereotypic.”

LanguageCert assessment criteria for Vocabulary at B2 level

Mark	Accuracy and range of vocabulary
3	A good command of B2 vocabulary. Good command of idiomatic expressions if and where appropriate. No serious errors of spelling or usage.
2	Adequate range of B2 vocabulary. AND/OR Few errors of spelling or appropriacy. Errors do not impede communication.
1	Limited range of vocabulary (below that expected at B2). AND/OR Many errors of spelling and/or appropriacy, some of which may impede communication. OR Task partially off topic.
0	Very basic repertoire (well below B2) AND/OR Many errors of spelling and/or appropriacy which impede communication. OR Whole task completely off topic.

A few examples of expected vocabulary at B2 level

- nice → charming, understanding, delightful, marvelous
- bad → poor, unsatisfactory, faulty, harmful, awful, shocking, dreadful
- interesting → fascinating, exciting, entertaining, appealing, engaging
- go → travel, move, leave, make one’s way

What to avoid?

- A common mistake: in many cases candidates only use very basic, generic words instead of coming up with some more sophisticated synonyms. Candidates should try and replace these basic words with more specific equivalents.
- The repetition of words and expressions must be avoided. Proofreading the text can help the candidate detect and fix this problem (with the use of pronouns, synonyms), as well as consulting a monolingual dictionary.
- Colloquial expressions and phrasal verbs: they are very welcome in informal texts, however, they are not allowed in formal pieces.

The issue of linking words

Linking words are welcome, however, candidates must avoid

- overusing them: In many compositions markers encounter an unnatural abundance of linking words. Discourse markers are not to be used in each and every sentence, only when and where they make sense and have a real function.
- using formal linking words in informal texts: We often find formal linking devices in personal letters, e.g. firstly, secondly, furthermore, nevertheless, as far as my humble opinion is concerned. Candidates are expected to be able to select the appropriate discourse markers according to the style, tone and genre indicated in the instructions.

The issue of going off topic

- If the piece of writing is off topic, the candidate is automatically given mark 0 for Task Fulfilment. Besides (as going off topic is also a vocabulary-related issue) for the criterion of Accuracy and range of vocabulary, the candidate might get mark 1 if the piece of writing is partially off topic; or mark 0 if the whole task is completely off topic. If a piece of writing is off topic, markers also consider the accuracy and range of the vocabulary used by the candidate when marking vocabulary (see descriptors for marks 1 and 0).
- However, the fact that the composition is off topic does not have any influence on marks awarded for Grammar and Structure.

The issue of lifting

One of the major vocabulary-related problems that markers often encounter is lifting, especially in Part 1 writing tasks. Lifting means that the candidate lifts the words and expressions used in the listed content points and the prompts of the task without any modification, and uses them in their piece of writing without any “added value”, instead of rephrasing or replacing them with synonyms. We expect candidates to understand and follow the instructions but not to copy the vocabulary items. Let us see an example.

Instructions of a Part 1 writing task:

Write an email to apply for the following job:

- *say what skills you have,*
- *enquire about accommodation,*
- *ask about pay.*

Write between 100 and 150 words.

SUNNY BAY HOLIDAY CAMP

*Are you energetic with a good sense of humour?
Do you enjoy arts and crafts?
Come and spend the summer with us.
Help to organise activities for children such as:
sports tournaments, art competitions and musical
performances*

Apply to Mr Green (Manager): jgreen@sunnybay.com

Candidates should avoid lifting vocabulary both from the bullet point list (content points) and the prompts (an advertisement in this case). Here are a few of examples of what lifting means in practice and how it can be avoided:

What to avoid: I would like to say what skills I have.

- *What to write instead:* I believe I am suitable for this job because...

What to avoid: I am energetic and I have a good sense of humour. I enjoy arts and crafts.

- *What to write instead:* I am considered to be a cheerful and easy-going person. I study art history at university, and in my free time I like to paint portraits. I am also good at playing the guitar.

What to avoid: I would like to help to organise activities for children such as sports tournaments.

- *What to write instead:* I have some experience in organising different programs for children as I worked in a similar camps last summer.

What to avoid: Can I enquire about accommodation?

- *What to write instead:* Please let me know where I could stay during the camp.

What to avoid: May I ask about pay?

- *What to write instead:* If possible, I would also like to get some information about salary.

Sample exam

The instructions of a Part 2 writing task

Last night you had a wonderful time celebrating your birthday. Write a letter to a friend who couldn't come, describing the evening and suggesting what you could do together to celebrate his/her birthday. Write between 150 and 200 words.

Sample 1 (158 words)

Dear Sue,

Last night I was in a wonderful birthday party. So I describing the birthday party for you. I arrive to Marci's house around 7 o'clock and there was a lot of people. There were some student from our school. When Marci gave his presents he was very happy. There were a lot of food. Marci maked popcorn and we watched a film. It was a very good horror film but I cant remember the title. After that we listen to music loudly and we danced. We plaid a karaoke game and everyone sang. It was a very funny game. After that we went to a plaza we like shopping so I buy jeans. When we bored we go back the house. Every people were tired so we watched an other film but I cant watch it because I fall sleep. So in my opinion it was a very good party. I cant wait hear for you.

Take care,

Lilla

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 0

Range of grammar severely limited. Many impeding errors that make the text difficult to follow: even basic verb tenses (Present Continuous, Past Simple) are used with a lot of errors; other errors such as plurals, was / were, prepositions, every people.

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 1

Limited range of vocabulary, below that expected at B2. Many errors of spelling (e.g. birthday, an other, cant) and appropriacy (e.g. give-get), some of which may impede communication.

Sample 1 – modified version (229 words)

Dear Sue,

How are you? I hope better. I am sorry you couldn't come to my birthday party with your broked leg, the evening was unforgettable. I'd like to share with you every details.

You know my party was in Marci's house because our flat is too tiny. I arrived around 7 o'clock and there was a lot of people: some student from our school but also from the aerobics studio which I attend. Of course I got my presents first and I was very happy. My friends prepare a lot of tasty food: pizzas, ice cream and snacks. Marci made my favourite popcorn (with caramel, you know I love it!) and we watched a film. It was a very good horror film but I can't remember the title. Then, as always, we played a karaoke game and everyone sang. After singing and dancing so lot, everyone were tired so we watched another film but unfortunately I can't watch it until the end because I fell asleep.

Oh, before I forget, your birthday coming soon, it is next month. I want to organise something special for you and I have lot of ideas. We can start in the nearby plaza with shopping and after that have party with friends. What do you think on my ideas?

I will call you and we will talk the details about your birthday.

Take care,

Lilla

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 1

Range of grammar too limited (below that expected at B2). Many errors not expected at B2 and some impeding errors (e.g. related to Past Simple, I hope better, every details, was / were, we will talk the details).

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 2

Adequate range of B2 vocabulary (e.g. unforgettable, attend, tasty). Few errors of spelling or appropriacy. Errors do not impede communication.

Sample 2 (170 words)

Dear Amy

It's such a shame, that you missed Rebeka's party! Although I'm sorry nobody invited you. We had an awesome time! As a matter of fact, a lot of people came to celebrate. We held the party in Rebeka's flat. The people started coming at like 6am. First and foremost, when everybody got there, they gave Rebeka their presents. Secondly, when they finished with their presents, Peter said he wanted to ask me something important.

Yeah, he proposed! I'm so happy, and, of course I said, yes! But oh well... Balázs came, too. Nevertheless, I didn't really want to see him, so I told him to go. It was really awkward! He loves me and I love him, too, but, now I decided to marry Peter because every cloud has a silver lining. But, I know Balázs for a long time and we can't forget each other. What should I do in your view?

All in all, next time we must celebrate your birthday! I will suggest something soon.

Love you Lili

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 2

Adequate range of B2 grammar used with no impeding errors.

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 2

Adequate range of B2 vocabulary (e.g. propose, awkward). Few errors of spelling or appropriacy (e.g. awesome). Errors do not impede communication. As only a few lines go off topic, and accuracy and range are otherwise adequate, the candidate can be awarded mark 2 instead of mark 1.

Sample 2 – modified version (203 words)

Dear Amy

It's such a shame, that you missed my party. We had an awesome time!

A lot of people came to celebrate. We held the party in our flat. The people started coming at like 6am.

When everybody got there, they gave me their presents: I was given a designer T-shirt with birds on it, an incredibly colourful china from Taiwan, a big Teddy bear shaped pillow! When they finished with their presents, Peter said he wanted to ask me something important. Yeah, he proposed! I was over the moon, and, of course I said, yes!

Well, the food was amazingly tasty. My mum baked me such a cake!! It was strawberry flavoured, and you know, how obsessed I am with strawberry! I ate so much I can barely move even now!

And oh well... Balázs came, too. I don't know how on earth he got to know about my party, but once he just showed up. I didn't really want to see him, so I told him to leave, so he walked away without saying a word. What about your birthday? Shall we visit that great restaurant that you've mentioned?

I can't wait to tell you every single detail in person!

Love you

Lili

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 3

Good range of grammar appropriate to B2 used with clarity, assurance and precision (e.g. Passive Voice, Reported Speech).

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 3

A good command of B2 vocabulary (e.g. such a shame, designer, strawberry flavoured, obsessed, show up). Good command of idiomatic expressions if and where appropriate. No serious errors of spelling or usage.