

TEACHERS' GUIDE TO ASSESSING GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

C1 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 C1 level’ below.)*

CEFR descriptor for Grammar at C1 level

“Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; occasional errors in grammar, collocations and idioms.”

LanguageCert assessment criteria for Grammar at C1 level

Mark	Accuracy and range of grammar
3	Good range of C1 grammar used with no impeding errors. There are few errors, which are very difficult to spot.
2	Adequate range of C1 grammar used. There are some errors, but none of them are impeding.
1	Range of grammar limited (below that expected at C1). Many errors not expected at C1. AND/OR Some impeding errors.
0	Range of grammar severely limited. AND/OR Very many errors not expected at C1. AND/OR Many impeding errors.

A few examples of expected grammar at C1 level

- Sentence structure: word order selected for emphasis
- Verb forms: all verb forms active and passive; mixed conditionals; ‘would’ expressing habit in the past; reported speech with full range of tenses and introductory verbs
- Modals: could have, should have, needn’t have

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 C1 level, the use of a wide range of structures, tenses and verb forms is required.
- 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 C1 level’ below.)*

CEFR descriptor for Vocabulary at C1 level

“Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express themselves clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say. The flexibility in style and tone is somewhat limited.”

LanguageCert assessment criteria for Vocabulary at C1 level

Mark	Accuracy and range of vocabulary
3	A good range of C1 vocabulary. AND Good command of idiomatic expressions if and where appropriate. AND No noticeable errors of spelling or usage.
2	An adequate range of C1 vocabulary, with few errors of spelling or appropriacy. Errors do not impede communication.
1	A limited range of vocabulary (below that expected at C1). AND/OR Many errors of spelling and/or appropriacy. AND/OR Some errors impede communication. OR Task partially off topic.
0	Very basic repertoire (well below C1). AND/OR Very many errors of spelling and/or appropriacy. AND/OR Many errors impede communication. OR Whole task completely off topic.

A few examples of expected vocabulary at C1 level

empty promise → pie in the sky; fashionable → snazzy; to be fond of sth → to have a penchant/predilection for sth; to cheat sb → to lead somebody down the garden path; very infrequent → rarer than hens' teeth; something of no importance → hill of beans; to read a lot → to have a gluttony for books; evening drink → nightcap; waste time with sth already done → beat a dead horse

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: 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 Accuracy and range of 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.

The instructions of a Part 1 writing task

You read the following statistics reported in the popular press. Write an article, incorporating the main findings, saying whether you agree or not according to your own experience. Add any other observations which would be relevant. Write between 150 and 200 words.

Are we happy?

49% of us claim to lose sleep from money worries.

60% of 16-25-year-olds worry they won't get a job.

41% of the elderly are so worried about finances that they cut down on electricity.

But are we all equally miserable?

53% of secretaries enjoy a good laugh every working day compared to just 0.4% of taxi drivers.

The happiest group of all appears to be teenage boys: 87% say they're happy at home and 81% of them are happy at school.

Candidates should avoid lifting vocabulary both from the instructions and the prompts (the statistics 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 read some statistics reported in the popular press. I would like to write about my opinion about this topic.

- *What to write instead:* Let me reflect on some statistics I have read in this magazine related to happiness.

What to avoid: 49% of us claim to lose sleep from money worries.

- *What to write instead:* Nearly 50% of people seem to have serious financial troubles that result in sleeping problems.

What to avoid: 60% of 16-25 year-olds worry they won't get a job

- *What to write instead:* A great number of young adults have job-related worries.

What to avoid: The happiest group of all appears to be teenager boys.

- *What to write instead:* Apparently adolescent boys are the happiest among all of us.

Sample exam

Sample 1 (143 words)

Dear Readers,

In this world where everything getting faster people don't claim to be happy. Almost half of the people can't sleep suffer of lose sleep because their money problems or worries. Men and women between 16-25 stressing about getting a job. Elderly people worrying about money so much, that they cut down on their electricity use.

Some of us don't have these worries, problems about of their every day life. Researchers show that secretaries enjoying their lifes more, than taxi drivers do. Statistics show that the happiest group of all are teenage boys. More than 80% of them as happy home as happy at school!

People who stress and worries too much usually have shorter life than the ones who enjoys life. Being happy can influence your social life and your career.

I wish you a happy and successful life!

Best wishes,

Bence Kiss

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 0

Range of grammar is severely limited (only very basic structures are used, often inaccurately). Very many errors not expected at C1 level, related to basic verb tenses and forms (see a few examples underlined).

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 1

Range of vocabulary is limited, below that expected at C1 level. Many errors of appropriacy and spelling (e.g. electricity use, every day life, researchers – researches, their lifes). Lifting (e.g. claim to, cut down on, the happiest group of all).

Sample 1 – modified version (191 words)

Don't worry, be happy

In this world, where everything is getting faster, a significant proportion of people do not seem to be happy – at least according to the statistics I have read. The statistics suggest that nearly half of us suffer from insomnia because of financial problems. Men and women between 16 and 25 stress about getting a job. Elderly people worry about money so much that they even choose to seriously limit their electricity usage. I am afraid I must say this is my experience, too.

However, some of us do not have these worries about everyday life. Researches show that secretaries enjoy life more than, for instance, taxi drivers do. Statistics also reveal that the happiest group of all is teenage boys: more than 80% of them are as happy at home as at school. This result surprises me a little, at least I personally was not a really happy teenager.

The way I see it, people who stress and worry too much usually have shorter lives than the ones who enjoy life. Besides, you must not forget that being happy can influence your social life and your career.

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 2

Range of grammar is adequate, not very wide but correctly used. There are some minor errors, but none of them are impeding.

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 2

Range of vocabulary is adequate (e.g. a significant proportion of people, statistics suggest, statistics also reveal), with few errors. Successfully attempts to avoid lifting (e.g. suffer from insomnia, limit their electricity usage).

Sample 2 (242 words)

Some people say, happiness is only a decision.

You know, if you watch everything in a positive way, don't care too much with your problems you will be able to live a better life.

But is this true? Can we just forget our worries and live like everything is perfectly fine? According to the statistics we can't.

On my opinion lot people have money issues these days. According to the statistics almost fifty percent have sleeping problems because of their problems. In my neighbourhood I can experience the same.

However even if you aren't lack of money, or you are still studying, you can be stressed about your future.

For example how will you be able to be independent, or will you get a great job. Naturally the elder generation has their own worries as well, like how to help their family or the electricity, like my own grandparents. To tell the truth your job can provide the happiness of your life, like secretaries who have a kind of enjoyable work compared to a doctor (who has a daily connection with death and disease).

Moreover I can see that most of people can't be happy about small things in life like a smile.

But anyways as you can see everybody has his or her own problems, there is no exception. On my opinion we are equally miserable, just not in the same way. Nobody can be 100% happy with his life.

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 1

Range of grammar is limited, below that expected at C1: only very simple structures are used; candidate does not even attempt to use Reported Speech – see underlined section. Many errors not expected at C1 level (e.g. don't care with, lot people, you aren't lack of money, a kind of enjoyable work).

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 1

Range of vocabulary is limited, below that expected at C1 level. Certain words and phrases reoccur several times, e.g. like, problem. Many errors of appropriacy (e.g. forget our worries, in my neighbourhood, on my opinion).

Sample 2 – modified version (277 words)

Does every cloud have a silver lining?

Some say happiness is only a matter of decision, suggesting that by focusing on the bright side of life rather than on your problems you will be able to lead a better life. But is this true? Can you just ignore your worries? According to certain statistics you cannot.

As for your degree of happiness, statistics reveal several crucial factors, all of which are linked to financial matters in one way or another. For a start, apparently almost fifty percent of people have sleeping issues caused by such problems; I have to admit that I myself can experience the same. However, even if the burden of earning a living does not rest on your shoulders, for instance because you are still studying, you might have other worries to be stressed about, such as how you will be able to become independent.

Naturally, the elderly generation has their own worries as well, such as paying their bills on due date. Somehow contrary to the above research, what I personally experience is that for many, an optimistic attitude is a conscious decision, irrespective of their financial background. It may be commonplace but a little happiness can be found on every corner, even in the simplest things like a sunny afternoon, a smile or an enjoyable Sunday picnic.

So, how can you profit from all this? To me, the answer seems clear-cut: whether you are an adolescent, a middle-aged secretary or a retired taxi driver, you are prone to become unhappy, but everyone should keep in mind that it is your own responsibility to seize the highlight of each day of your life.

Accuracy and range of grammar: mark 3

Good range of grammar. There are only few errors, which are very difficult to spot.

Accuracy and range of vocabulary: mark 3

A good range of C1 vocabulary and good command of idiomatic expressions, used where appropriate. No noticeable errors of spelling or usage.