



Practising First Writing Part 1

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A. TEACHERS' NOTES

Description

Time required:	50–60 minutes
Materials required:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Classroom Handout 1 (one copy per student)▪ Classroom Handout 2 (one copy per pair of students)▪ Classroom Handout 3 (cut up, see below)▪ Classroom Handout 4 (one copy per student)
Aims:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ To focus on the process of writing an informal transactional letter▪ To raise learners' awareness of the skills involved in producing a written text▪ To practise writing an informal transactional letter based on written input

A1. Lesson Plan

1. Before the class: copy and cut up Classroom Handout 3. You will need 16 strips of paper, even if your class is larger or smaller than this.
2. Write the word '**Holidays**' in a circle on the board. In pairs learners have one minute to write down all the words they associate with it.

Check the answers with the whole class. Write each suggestion on the board with a line joining it to the original word, so that you get a 'sunray' effect.

Examples might include some of the following:

a package holiday, a camping holiday, a cruise, a skiing holiday, a sightseeing holiday, flights, check-in, customs, travel agency, sunbathing, packing, backpacking, swimming pool, water sports, etc.

Timing: 3–5 minutes

3. Give out A3 Classroom Handout 1.

Ask learners to read the exam writing task and to underline key words. They should not worry about unknown vocabulary as you will deal with it later.

Learners work on their own. Once finished, they check answers in pairs.

Check the answers with the whole class. Encourage learners to do this for any writing task, especially in Part 1 (compulsory task) where specific information must be included in their answer (i.e. the notes).



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(Suggested answers: 120–150 words; appropriate style; write a letter; use all...notes; come to Spain; my holiday home; in the summer; when; evenings; town; what...to do?; location; city nearby; how far?; transport? packing; type of clothes.)

Timing: 3–5 minutes

4. Give out *A4 Classroom Handout 2*.

Learners read the ten statements and discuss in pairs whether they think they are true or not. They should correct the false ones.

The teacher monitors and helps as necessary.

Once they have all finished the activity, check their answers with the whole class.

(Answers: see A2 Answer Keys.)

Timing: 10 minutes

5. *(optional step)* You could extend the discussion by eliciting from learners what they need to focus on when they are answering this part of the Writing test. *(Answers: see A2 Answer Keys.)*

Timing: 5 minutes

6. Give out *A5 Classroom Handout 3*, copied and cut into strips. Give each learner one strip each. If there are more than 16 learners, ask some to work in pairs. If there are fewer than 16 learners, give some learners a definition and a word/phrase.

Tell learners they have exactly five minutes to read out the definitions they have on their strips of paper and see if they can match them to the words/phrases from Sam's letter.

Learners get up and walk around the room to do this activity. The teacher monitors. Encourage them to do the exercise without looking at the letter first. If they are stuck, they should use the letter to help them work out the meanings.

Once all the words have been matched, write the answers on the board. Encourage the learners to write down the words/phrases and definitions into their notebooks.

Point out that this is not a First exam task and in the exam they will not be expected to understand this kind of expression. However, it's useful for them to start to learn words and phrases like this.

Timing: 10 minutes.

7. Give out *A6 Classroom Handout 4*.

Ask learners to spend five minutes writing a plan of their letter to Sam on their own, expanding the notes and adding their own ideas. They must use their own words as far as possible and not copy words directly from the question.

Before they begin writing their plan you can ask the following concept questions:

1. Who are you writing to?
2. Why are you writing?
3. How do you know what you must put in your reply?



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4. How can you begin and end the letter? (*Answers: see A2 Answer Keys.*)

Monitor and help where necessary. Once finished, learners can compare their ideas in pairs. If time allows, elicit some of their ideas and write them on the board.

(*Suggested answers: see A2 Answer Keys.*)

Timing: 10–15 minutes

8. Tell learners to write the letter for homework using some of the ideas from the useful language box. As they have already written a plan, they should spend about 30 minutes writing and give themselves five minutes to check their work.



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A2. Answer Keys

A1 Lesson Plan Step 4

Learners should focus on:

1. Reading the instructions carefully, underlining key words.
2. Who they are writing to and what overall impression their writing will have on them.
3. Planning and connecting ideas so that they include all the relevant information.
4. Allowing themselves 5 minutes at the end to check grammar and spelling.

Lesson Plan Step 7

1. Sam
2. To tell Sam best time for visit and why
3. The notes
4. *Dear Sam, Hi Sam; See you soon, Love, Can't wait!, etc*

Possible plan:

Paragraph 1: Thanks for letter and general remark

Paragraph 2: When you want to travel and why

Paragraph 3: Request for further information e.g. What is there to do in the evenings?
How far is the city and how to get there?

Paragraph 4: Ask what kind of clothes to bring.

Paragraph 5: Closing remark

A4 Classroom Handout 2

1. T
2. F – You have already agreed to go. The first line of Sam's letter reads 'I'm so glad you want to come to Spain with me.'
3. F – Your letter must include all the points in the notes, i.e. the information your friend has asked for and the notes you have made.
4. F – Your writing for Part 1 should be between 120-150 words.
5. T
6. F – You must use a **pen** in the writing paper.
7. T
8. T
9. F – Your writing will also be assessed on accuracy including grammar, spelling and punctuation.
10. T



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A5 Classroom Handout 3

The location is far from the places that people usually visit.	off the beaten track
A place which is private and undisturbed by other people.	secluded
Scenery which is very pretty.	picturesque
You can relax and enjoy yourself doing very little.	laze around
You can have a really good time in places like nightclubs.	hit the town
A place surrounded and influenced by history.	steeped in history
Someone who is very interested in the arts, e.g. art galleries and theatres.	culture vulture
The latest possible opportunity to get something at a lower price.	last minute bargain



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A3. Classroom Handout 1

You must answer this question. Write your answer in 120–150 words in an appropriate style.

1. You have received a letter from Sam, an English-speaking friend. Read Sam's letter and the notes you have made. Then write a letter to Sam, using all your notes.



Say when
and why

What is
there to
do?

I'm so glad you want to come to Spain with me. Here's a picture of the view from my holiday home. My dad says we can stay there any time in the summer. When would you like to go?

We can laze around by the pool or the secluded beach surrounded by the picturesque scenery of the green mountains. It's also great for a range of water sports and in the evenings we can hit the town.

About the location, the house is off the beaten track but the city nearby is steeped in history, so it would be ideal for a culture vulture like you!

You can get your last-minute bargain on the internet. Get packing!

Reply soon

Sam

How far?
What
transport is
there?

Type of
clothes?

Write your **letter**. You must use grammatically correct sentences with accurate spelling and punctuation in a style appropriate for the situation.



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A4. Classroom Handout 2

Read the task again. In pairs, decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F) and correct the false ones.

1. You are writing to your friend Sam.
2. You have to accept Sam's invitation to go on holiday with him/her.
3. You don't have to include all the points in the notes.
4. You have to write about 100 words.
5. You should write your letter in an informal style.
6. You can write your letter in pencil.
7. You should make a plan before writing, and try to connect your ideas clearly.
8. You must remember to use paragraphs and make sure the language is suitable for what you are writing.
9. You don't need to worry about spelling and grammar mistakes when you write.
10. You can use contractions, shorter sentences, colloquial expressions, phrasal verbs, exclamation marks and connectors such as *and* or *but*.



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A5. Classroom Handout 3

Before the lesson, copy and cut out the definitions and words/phrases onto separate strips of paper.

The location is far from the places that people usually visit.

The location is private and undisturbed by other people.

Scenery which is very pretty.

You can relax and enjoy yourself doing very little.

You can have a really good time in places like nightclubs.

A place surrounded and influenced by history.

Someone who is very interested in the arts, e.g. art galleries and theatres.

The latest possible opportunity to get something at a lower price.

off the beaten track

last minute bargain

secluded

culture vulture

laze around

steeped in history

picturesque

hit the town



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A6. Classroom Handout 4

1. Plan your letter.

Work on your own and write a plan. Try to expand the notes in the task into sentences by adding your own ideas. Your letter could have five paragraphs.

Compare your ideas with a partner.

2. Write your letter.

Remember that an informal letter still needs to be well-organised and to have clear paragraphs.

Check your work when you have finished.

USEFUL LANGUAGE

Starting the letter

- Thanks very much for your letter. It was really nice to hear from you again.
- How have you been? I've been really busy
- How are things with you and your family?

Introducing the topic

- I thought I'd better write and give you some more details about
- The most suitable month for me to come is
- In the morning/In the afternoon, I'd like to try.... because....
- I'd also be interested in trying.... because...
- The location of your house gives us the chance to go....ing

Finishing the letter

- Anyway that's all for now.
- I can't wait to visit you. It sounds like we're going to have an amazing time.
- I'd better stop here. I've got to
- I'm looking forward to seeing you again.



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A7. Suggested homework/self-study activities

- Instead of handing their letters to you (the teacher), you could ask your learners to check each other's letters and make some comments/suggestions. They can use the checklist provided below if you want to structure the feedback.
- Learners study the feedback from their peers and consider any errors in their writing. This is a good learning skills activity as learners learn to evaluate each other and to accept feedback from their peers.
- Learners should hand in their letters only after they have been evaluated. Some learners may wish to write an improved version in response to the evaluation, which they can give in later to the teacher.

Checklist

- Have the four points been included and expanded to fulfil the task?
- Is the letter organised into logical paragraphs?
- Has the writer used an appropriate style? (In this case informal, e.g. used contractions, phrasal verbs, colloquial expressions, etc.).
- Has the writer used appropriate linking words or phrases? (Remember this is an **informal** letter, connectors such as *therefore*, *consequently*, *however* should **not** be used).
- Has the writer avoided copying words from the question?
- Has the writer written the right number of words? (Remember Part 1 is 120–150 words and Part 2 is 120–180 words).
- Has the writer shown some range of language?
- Are there any serious mistakes?
- Does the letter begin and end correctly?



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B. GUIDANCE FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. The writing task on A2. *Classroom Handout 1* was written by a teacher. It shows other teachers how easy it is to create your own writing task. This is also a good way of recycling previously taught language.

When writing or choosing a task, it is important to think about the following:

- grade the language; in this task, the teacher used some difficult vocabulary and colloquial expressions, so that she could do a different activity later to change the pace of the class
 - include some visuals if possible, in this case, the teacher used her own holiday photograph. You can also use photos from websites such as Flickr, or cut out from magazines or newspapers.
 - look for suitable advertisements from a website You can also use magazines, newspapers, First course books or even get your learners to write one.
 - adapt the text to suit your needs. If you think the language is difficult, you could change a high level word with an easier synonym.
2. In A3. *Classroom Handout 2* we asked the learners to discuss True or False statements. This is very important, because:
 - it helps learners to focus on the process of writing an informal transactional letter
 - it encourages them to think about what is required for the specific task, i.e. to use the information and the notes appropriately to complete the task
 - it focuses learners attention on the right style of language to use.
 - it encourages learners to make a plan before they write anything.

It is easy to create a similar exercise. Some of the statements are general and can be applied to any written task, e.g. numbers 6, 7, 8 and 9.

3. In A5. *Classroom Handout 3* we dealt with the difficult vocabulary contained in the letter. This was a way varying the pace of the lesson.

To make a similar exercise:

- Choose some interesting or useful words or phrases that your learners have encountered recently in texts.
- Find some good definitions in a dictionary and write them down on strips of paper, along with the target vocabulary. Give them out and ask learners to do a mingle activity.
- Follow up by asking learners to work in groups to make up sentences using the target vocabulary. Write the best or most interesting sentences on a poster to put on the wall, or set up a page on a website such as Wordwall (<http://wordwall.co.uk/>) or Lino (<http://en.linoit.com/>) .



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The definitions used in this lesson are from the Cambridge Dictionary Online
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

4. In *A7. Classroom Handout 4* learners were asked to write a plan. Planning a letter or other written task before writing is vital as it helps learners to avoid making mistakes. Planning is useful, because:
 - Learners are less likely to include unnecessary or irrelevant information or miss out information altogether.
 - It helps them to connect their ideas logically and use clear paragraphs
 - It provides 'thinking time' as they start to access useful words and phrases they can use in their text
 - It encourages learners to think about the style most suited to the situation and target reader.
5. In *A7. Classroom Handout 4* learners have to write the letter for homework. If you have a longer lesson, you might like to treat this section as an informal workshop session brainstorming ideas for expansion, encouraging them to review their writing, replacing frequently used words with a wider range.

Alternatively, ask your learners to write the actual letter in the class as a timed task, so that they get a feel for the exam.

6. Finally, always give your learners individual feedback. Encourage them to take small steps forward all the time, pointing out what has been achieved and where improvements can still be made. Build up their confidence, without giving a false impression of their writing skills.