

Reading: essays, reports and criticism

English B2

What this topic teaches

B2 reading handles paid-writing shapes: the **essay** (a case argued), the **report** (findings served neutrally), and **criticism** (a work judged with criteria). Each wears a different uniform; misread the uniform and you misread everything after it.

- An essay argues: thesis, counter-argument, reply.
- A report informs: findings under headings, no visible author.
- Criticism judges: the criteria are announced before the verdict.
- Memory hook: read the **uniform** first - who is this text trying to be?

essay argues a case	report informs, author hidden	criticism judges a work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a thesis at the end of the intro• one reason per paragraph• “Granted, some argue...” <p>sounds like:</p> <p><i>Therefore uniforms should not be compulsory.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• headings: Method, Findings...• passive: were surveyed• numbered recommendations <p>sounds like:</p> <p><i>The committee recommends option B.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• criteria announced first• verdict point by point• quotes from the work <p>sounds like:</p> <p><i>The book fails as a guide: its examples are out of date.</i></p>

The uniform gives the text away: three clues and a typical sentence for each

The essay: a case argued

An essay is a march in one direction. The **thesis** stands in the introduction, body paragraphs each carry one reason, and the conclusion restates the thesis in triumph.

Essay part	What to find
introduction	the thesis, usually the last sentence
body paragraphs	topic sentence, evidence, mini-conclusion
counter-argument	granted, some argue... followed by a reply
conclusion	the thesis, restated plus consequence

- A good essay shows the opposing view fairly before answering it: the counter-argument is quoted, then answered.

The report: findings under headings

Reports hide the author. Headings carry the structure, and every claim arrives with a number or a source.

- Structure by headings: Method, Findings, Recommendations - each heading answers a question the reader already has.
- The passive voice is not coldness; it is the uniform: *Participants were surveyed...*
- Recommendations live at the end and are numbered: read them first if you are in a hurry.

Criticism: criteria before verdicts

Criticism (of a film, a book, a policy) judges a work, and honest criticism announces the **criteria** before the verdict.

- The criteria sentence: *As a study guide, this book succeeds or fails on three counts: accuracy, structure, and voice.*
- The verdict then follows point by point; a verdict without visible criteria is just taste with a megaphone.
- Fair criticism quotes the work: the critic shows the evidence, not only the judgement.

■ A first try

Uniform check. *The committee recommends option B (uniform: report). The book fails as a guide: its examples are out of date, and its voice talks down to the reader (uniform: criticism, two criteria). Therefore school uniforms should not be compulsory (uniform: essay thesis).*

Unknown words at B2: the sentence's spine

- Find the verb and its subject first; the long noun phrases around them are decoration.
- Abstract nouns repeat: meet *sustainability* five times and it is the topic, however it translates.
- One in twenty words unknown is B2 normal; three in one sentence means you have lost the spine - reread the topic sentence.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Do not read headings as sentences: they are labels; the paragraph beneath them carries the claim.
- The passive voice is not evasive in a report; it is the uniform. Ask instead: is the source named?
- A critic's vivid adjectives are evidence-backed or they are noise: check for the quote before believing the verdict.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. Findings under headings with no visible author: which shape? – **A report.**
2. In an essay, where does the thesis usually stand? – **In the introduction, usually its last sentence.**
3. Name the three counts in the criteria sentence above. – **Accuracy, structure and voice.**
4. Passive voice with a named source: evasive or uniform? – **Uniform.** The passive is the report's normal style; a named source is what keeps it honest.

■ Practice: name the uniform

Read each extract and decide: essay, report or criticism. Then answer the question.

1. “*As a history of the internet, the film must be judged on two things: whether it gets the facts right, and whether it makes them matter. On the first count it mostly succeeds; on the second, it rarely tries. The founders appear as cardboard heroes, and the three-hour running time turns curiosity into duty.*” – Which shape? What are its criteria, and what is its verdict on each?
2. “*Findings. 312 students were surveyed in March. 58% reported using the library less than once a month. The most common reason given was opening hours (41%). Recommendations: 1. Extend weekday opening to 9 p.m. 2. Review the Sunday closure.*” – Which shape? Which finding do both recommendations answer?
3. “*It is often argued that homework teaches discipline. Granted, a regular task builds habits. Yet discipline grows just as well from sport, music or a part-time job, none of which costs a family evening. Homework for under-twelves should therefore be optional.*” – Which shape? Find the counter-argument and the thesis.

Answers. 5 **Criticism.** Criteria: **getting the facts right** and **making them matter.** Verdict: mostly right on the first, a failure on the second (*cardboard heroes, duty*). 6 **A report:** headings, numbers, passive (*were surveyed*), numbered recommendations. Both recommendations answer the most common reason, **opening hours (41%):** one extends weekday evenings, the other reviews Sundays. 7

An essay. Counter-argument: *homework teaches discipline ... builds habits* (*Granted*). Thesis: ***Homework for under-twelves should therefore be optional.*** Here it comes last, after the reply, so look for *therefore* as well as the introduction.