Writing an informal email

IGCSE English

Why and to whom you write

Imagine telling a friend about a school visit that did not go as planned. Your reader needs more than “It was good”. An **informal email** shares relevant news with someone you know, using an appropriate personal voice.

In Cambridge 0510 Paper 1 Exercise 5, write 120–160 words for the stated purpose and reader. Both the 2024–2026 and 2027–2029 syllabuses give up to 6 marks for content and 9 for language. These assess the response as a whole, including task fulfilment, development, appropriate style, accuracy and organisation. A phrase or extra sentence does not automatically earn a mark.

■ Cover every prompt

Read all the **prompts** and their command words. “Explain why” needs a reason; “describe” needs relevant information about what happened; “say what you enjoyed most” needs a clear choice. Address every requested point and develop it sufficiently. Missing a point weakens task fulfilment, but do not invent a fixed mark deduction without the actual scheme.

Original classroom task. You recently visited a science museum with your class. Something unexpected happened. Write an email to your friend Sam. Explain why your class chose the museum, describe the unexpected event and how you responded, and say what you enjoyed most and why. Write 120–160 words. You may invent plausible details consistent with this fictional task.

Planning attempt. Choose a reason, an unexpected event and a favourite activity. Can “I went on Friday; it was great” answer all three prompts? Decide what information is missing before adding more words.

Worked plan. Space lessons motivated the visit. A temporary lighting failure interrupted a demonstration; the group waited and asked the guide questions. A Mars journey-planning activity was the favourite because classmates could compare ideas. These are original fictional choices, not facts about a real museum. A date alone does not answer why the class chose it.

■ Use a friendly tone

An **informal tone** suits the relationship. Contractions and natural questions can help, but there is no requirement to insert a question or exclamation mark into every email. Avoid copying a phrase such as “Thanks for your email” when no earlier message is established. Warm writing can still be grammatical and clear.

A friendship illustrates the intended relationship; the people pictured are not evidence about the fictional task

Plan for the actual reader and purpose before drafting

How to build your email

Organise the response so the reader can follow the news and find every requested point. Cambridge’s guide recommends separate paragraphs for the prompts as a useful planning scaffold. It is advice, not a rule that every related idea must occupy its own paragraph.

Hi Sam,

We chose the museum to explore our space topic.	reason for the visit
The lights failed; we waited and asked the guide questions.	event and response
I liked planning a Mars journey because we compared ideas.	favourite and why

See you soon,

Lin

A useful scaffold: check all prompts, but let related ideas connect naturally

Greeting and ending

A **greeting** such as "Hi Sam," or "Dear Sam," can suit a friend. A friendly **closing** such as "See you soon," or "Best wishes," can suit the situation. Use your name appropriately; first name is a natural choice here, not a universal ban on full names. "Dear" by itself does not make a message formal.

Original choice task. For the museum email, choose between "Dear Sir or Madam" and "Hi Sam". Then choose between "See you soon" and "Yours faithfully". Explain the fit to the actual relationship rather than memorising one greeting for every task.

Worked choice. "Hi Sam" and "See you soon" fit this friendly message. The traditional business-letter pairing would sound distant here. Other natural friendly pairs can also work.

Paragraphs

Use clear **paragraphs** . For this task, a reason for the visit, the unexpected event and response, and the favourite activity form a useful sequence. Keep openings and endings brief enough to leave room for the requested content. Do not turn an email into headings or a bullet-point answer.

Useful language

Short forms such as "I'm", "didn't" and "we're" suit friendly writing; full forms remain grammatical.

Original register repair. Rewrite "Dear Sir. I am writing to inform you that I visited a museum." for Sam. Keep the visit; add only plausible fictional details.

Possible revision. "Hi Sam, I went to the science museum with my class and wanted to tell you about it." "Guess what!" is another possible opening when it fits the news, not a compulsory formula.

Making your email better

Ideas are **developed** when relevant explanation helps the reader understand the point. Length alone does not establish development.

Develop your ideas

A **reason** answers why; an **example** makes an idea concrete; a **detail** gives relevant information. Add what the prompt needs. Repetition or an unrelated detail may add words without improving the answer.

I enjoyed the Mars activity.	bare choice
I enjoyed it because we could compare ideas.	relevant reason
We planned the journey and chose equipment together.	explaining detail

Development depends on relevance, not a word count or an automatic mark ladder.

Relevant explanation develops an idea; extra words do not guarantee extra marks

Original development attempt. Improve "I enjoyed the Mars activity". Explain what you did and why it was enjoyable. Then decide whether "My pencil was blue" helps answer the same prompt.

Worked revision. "I enjoyed planning a journey to Mars because we could compare ideas and choose the equipment together." This connects the activity to the enjoyment. Pencil colour does not explain that enjoyment in the stated situation. Do not add invented real-world statistics to make the fictional account sound proven.

Check before you finish

Check every prompt, the consistency of events, word range and a suitable voice. Then check sentence boundaries, spelling, verb forms and links. For example, "Last Friday I have visited" should be "Last Friday I visited" in this completed-time account. Different tenses can be appropriate for background, earlier events and future plans; do

not force one tense everywhere.

A model email

Write your response before reading this original teaching model. It is not an officially marked answer. Its fictional details follow the task above.

> Hi Sam,
>
> How are things? I went to the science museum with my class last Friday, and I've got to tell you about it. We chose the museum because we were studying space and wanted to see how astronauts live.
>
> The visit didn't start smoothly. Just as our guide began explaining a model spacecraft, the room lights went out. We waited in the corridor while the staff checked the problem. At first I was disappointed, but our guide used the time to answer our questions.
>
> My favourite part came later, when we tried planning a journey to Mars. I enjoyed comparing ideas with my classmates rather than only looking at displays. It made our science lessons feel much more real.
>
> Would you like to go together during the holidays? Let me know when you are free.
>
> See you soon,
> Lin

The body has 134 words by a space-separated count, excluding greeting, sign-off and name. The space topic explains the choice of museum. The lighting failure and corridor wait describe the event and response. The Mars activity and comparison of ideas explain the favourite part. The invitation fits the relationship but is not required by the three prompts. Full forms in this model are grammatical and do not by themselves make it a business letter.

Original review attempt. A different draft says: "Hi Sam, I went to a museum on Friday. There were many rooms and a café. The trip was great. See you soon." Identify the unanswered prompts. Repair the content before adding decorative phrases.

Worked review. It does not explain why the class chose the museum, give the unexpected event and response, or identify the favourite activity with a reason. Saying the whole trip was great does not supply those specific answers. Use a plan to add relevant development rather than repeating "great".

Exam tips

Verified exam connection: June 2025 0510/12 Question 16 asks about a family weekend away, including why the family went, a problem and its effects. "What the problem was" and "how it affected the family" are separate demands. The official scheme assesses task fulfilment and development, not a guaranteed mark for each extra detail. Our museum model answers a different original practice task.

Cambridge's informal-email guide recommends relevant development of all requested points, suitable personal language and clear organisation. It warns against unsuitable formal links, misused idioms and weak tense control. A friendly tone is more than spelling contractions or adding exclamation marks.

Independent original task. Write 120–160 words to a friend about helping at a school book exchange. Explain why you volunteered, describe a difficulty and your response, and say what you learned. Invent plausible details consistent with the scenario. Plan and draft before reviewing.

Possible plan, not a full answer. You wanted more students to find affordable reading; the labels were mixed up, so you helped sort books; you learned to give clear directions and check details. Other coherent accounts are valid. Review all prompts, relevant development, event consistency, voice and language. No checklist guarantees an official score.

Vocabulary card meanings

informal email: A message to a friend, in relaxed language. prompts: Short cues that say what the answer should cover. greeting: The opening words of a letter or an email. closing: The words used to end a letter or an email. short forms: Shortened spellings such as I'm, common in informal writing. developed: Expanded with reasons and detail, not left as one bare point. reason: A cause offered for holding a view. example: One particular instance that makes a point easier to grasp.