

In this exam almost every lost mark comes from answering with more than was asked, or with words copied from the paper. Everything below is from Cambridge's own examiner reports. × ,✓

1 · Reading skills

✗ Writing a full sentence where a short phrase was wanted, and burying the answer inside it.

✓ **Answer briefly and precisely, in a phrase.**

Raised in five separate reports: precise reading and a brief answer are what Exercise 1 tests.

ER 5 sessions P1

✗ Adding an extra detail to a correct answer, in case it helps.

✓ **Give only what the question asks for.**

Examiners state that incorrect information included with a correct response can negate an otherwise correct answer.

ER 2 sessions P1

✗ Reading the question quickly and missing whether it asks HOW, WHY or WHEN.

✓ **Underline the question word and the key words before you look for the answer.**

Examiners recommend highlighting the question words in four separate reports, and the central focus of every question in Exercises 1 to 4.

ER 4 sessions P1

✗ Answering with the passage's own wording because it appeared near the answer.

✓ **Look for the synonym or paraphrase – the text says the same thing in different words.**

Examiners state the texts express the information using different words and structures from the questions.

ER 2 sessions P1

✗ Choosing an option in Exercise 4 because its details appear in the text.

✓ **Every option's details appear in the text. Choose the one that fully ANSWERS the question.**

Examiners make this point in five reports – it is the whole design of the exercise.

ER 5 sessions P1

✗ Matching a paragraph to an option from one matching word.

✓ **Decide what the whole paragraph is saying, following the discourse markers through it.**

Examiners state that identifying the correct answer involves following the markers across consecutive sentences.

ER 2 sessions P1

■ Exercise 2 tests attitudes and opinions, and what is implied but not stated. Examiners raise this in eight separate reports.

ER 8 sessions P1

9 · Listening skills

✗ Writing the first thing you hear that fits the gap.

✓ **Listen to the whole sentence – a distractor usually comes BEFORE the answer.**

Examiners warn about distracting information in the listening texts in two separate reports.

ER 2 sessions P2

✗ Including a word that is already printed before or after the gap.

✓ **Write only the missing words. Read the printed sentence back to check it makes sense.**

Raised in four reports for Exercises 2 and 5. A repeated word makes the sentence ungrammatical and loses the mark.

ER 4 sessions P2

✗ Listening with no idea what kind of word is missing.

✓ **Predict before the recording starts: a number, a name, a time, a place.**

Examiners recommend this in four separate reports – prediction is what makes the gap findable.

ER 4 sessions P2

✗ Writing a singular noun where the recording said a plural, or the wrong preposition.

✓ **Check the number and the preposition – ‘two tickets’, ‘arrive AT’.**

Examiners raise singular and plural forms in five reports: they alter the key meaning and cost the mark.

ER 5 sessions P2

✗ Spelling a word so that it becomes a different word – ‘site’ for ‘sight’, ‘poor’ for ‘pour’.

✓ **A spelling attempt is accepted only when the intended word is not in doubt; a homophone is a different word.**

Examiners state that spelling attempts creating a homophone are not accepted.

ER 3 sessions P2

✗ Writing a rough guess with the wrong number of syllables.

✓ **Mimic what you heard: the same number of syllables and the same vowel and consonant sounds.**

Examiners describe exactly this as what makes a phonetic attempt creditable.

ER 2 sessions P2

✗ Writing ‘eighteen’ where the speaker said ‘eighty’.

✓ **Practise the number pairs – the stress falls differently: EIGHTy against eightTEEN.**

Examiners name this pair specifically and recommend practising number transcription.

-teen -ty

ER 2 sessions P2

✗ Using the same letter twice in Exercise 3.

✓ **Each letter is used once. If two boxes share a letter, neither can be credited.**

Examiners state this in four reports: even a correct one of the pair loses its mark.

ER 4 sessions P2

✗ Circling one option and then writing another nearby.

✓ **Make it absolutely clear which answer is your final one – cross the other out fully.**

Examiners raise this in four reports; an ambiguous answer cannot be marked.

ER 4 sessions P2

11 · Vocabulary and text types

✗ Writing a full sentence under a note-taking heading.

✓ **Write a brief note, and supply a verb only where the heading needs one.**

Raised in six reports. The bullet points tell you how many notes each section wants.

ER 6 sessions P1

✗ Writing a note that does not belong under the heading it sits beneath.

✓ **Read the heading first, and check the note answers THAT heading.**

Examiners state responses must correspond to the headings of each section.

ER 6 sessions P1

■ Write legibly and form each letter clearly. Examiners state in two reports that marks may not be awarded where a response cannot be read, and that alterations should be crossed out rather than written over.

ER 2 sessions P1

8 · Writing an essay

✗ Writing a summary that runs past the word limit and putting a good point at the end.

✓ **Stay inside the limit. Content after it is not read.**

Examiners state that content points included after the stated word limit cannot be credited.

ER 2 sessions P1

✗ Opening a summary with a long introduction.

✓ **Start with the first content point. There is no room for a preamble.**

Examiners tell candidates to avoid long introductions and irrelevant details, because they consume the word count.

ER 2 sessions P1

✗ Including a detail from the text because it is interesting.

✓ **Ask whether it is relevant to the summary TOPIC the question names.**

Examiners state candidates should consider carefully whether each piece of information is relevant to the topic set.

ER 5 sessions P1

3 · Writing an informal email

✗ Writing an email to a friend in formal English, with ‘Dear Sir or Madam’.

✓ **Exercise 5 is informal: a friendly greeting, contractions, a sense of the reader.**

Raised in five reports: the informal register is a marked requirement of this task.

ER 5 sessions P1

✗ Covering two of the three prompts.

✓ **Address every bullet point AND develop each one.**

Examiners state that all bullet points have to be addressed and developed to access the marks.

ER 4 sessions P1

4 · Writing a formal letter or email

✗ Writing Exercise 6 in the same friendly style as Exercise 5.

✓ **This task needs a more formal tone and register, for a different audience.**

Raised in five separate reports as a defining requirement of the task.

6

ER 5 sessions P1

✗ Using only the prompts given, expanded into paragraphs.

✓ **Add your own ideas and develop them – that is what the higher bands require.**

Examiners state that relying solely on the prompts keeps a response out of the higher bands.

ER 5 sessions P1

2 · Writing: purpose, audience and accuracy

✗ Writing far more, or far less, than the task asks for.

✓ **Check the word range in the rubric and stay inside it.**

Examiners raise the word limit for Exercises 1, 3, 4 and the writing tasks, and record omissions where candidates ran out of time.

ER 2 sessions P1

✗ Starting to write before identifying the purpose and the audience.

✓ **Read the rubric, name the purpose, name the reader, then plan.**

Examiners state candidates must read the rubric carefully and identify the purpose and all key information to be included.

ER 5 sessions P1

✗ Leaving no time to check agreement, tense and plurals.

✓ **Save two minutes per task to reread it.**

Accuracy is separately assessed, and singular/plural errors are the ones examiners name most often.

ER 5 sessions P2

10 · Speaking skills

✗ Answering the examiner's prompt with one sentence.

✓ **Develop each answer with a reason and an example.**

The conversation is assessed on development as well as accuracy; a short answer gives the examiner nothing to credit.

ER 3 sessions P3

✗ Reciting a prepared passage.

✓ **Answer the question that was actually asked.**

A memorised answer is audible and does not respond to the prompt, so it cannot score for content.

ER 2 sessions P3

■ Listen to the recording quality and the timing instructions your centre gives. Examiners remind centres to check sound quality and follow the timings for every part.

ER 2 sessions P3