

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. × ,✓

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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

- ✗ 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 eighTEEN.
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

✗ 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