

Extended writing is judged on two things at once: whether you did what the task asked (content) and how accurately and appropriately you wrote it (language). These models are full answers of a realistic length, each followed by a note on where the credit sits and which sentence would have lost it. Read the note, not only the model.

Informal email

I Your friend has moved to another city and has written asking how you are. Write a reply. In your email you should say what has changed at school, describe something you have done recently, and invite your friend to visit.

Hi Mei,

It was so good to get your message – the flat sounds much nicer than your old one, and I am glad the neighbours are friendly.

Things at school have changed quite a lot since you left. We have a new science teacher, Mr Chen, who makes us do an experiment almost every lesson, so Tuesday afternoons are much more interesting than they used to be. The bad news is that the library is closed for building work until March, so everyone is revising in the canteen and it is impossibly noisy.

Last weekend I finally went to the new skate park with Amir. I fell over about twenty times in the first hour and my knees still have not forgiven me, but by the end I could get all the way down the slope without stopping, which felt like a real achievement. Amir filmed it, so there is video evidence.

Anyway, why don't you come and stay in the holidays? My mum has already said it is fine, and there is a spare bed in my room. We could go to the skate park, and I could finally show you that noodle place I keep talking about. Let me know which week would suit you.

Write back soon and tell me about your new school.

Love,

Ana

Commentary: All three content points are covered and each is DEVELOPED – a new teacher plus what that changes, the skate park plus what happened there, the invitation plus a concrete plan and a question. A common failure is to mention all three in one sentence each and then fill the rest with greetings; content marks reward development, not coverage alone. The register is consistently informal: contractions, short exclamations, “Anyway” as a paragraph opener, a joke about the knees. Language credit here comes from RANGE used accurately – “impossibly noisy”, “which felt like a real achievement”, “have not forgiven me” – rather than from long sentences. Note the ending: it asks a question, which makes the email a real exchange rather than a monologue.

Formal letter

I You saw a notice asking students to apply to be a volunteer guide at a local museum. Write a letter of application. Say why you are interested, what qualities you would bring, and when you would be available.

Dear Ms Oduya,

I am writing to apply for the position of volunteer guide at the City Museum, which was advertised on the notice board at Riverside School.

I am particularly interested in this role because I have visited the museum many times and I find the section on local industry fascinating. I would like the chance to help other young people enjoy it as much as I do. I am also considering studying history after school, so the experience would be genuinely valuable to me.

I believe I would bring several useful qualities to the role. I am patient and I enjoy explaining things clearly; I have spent the past year helping younger students with their reading, which has taught me to adjust how I explain something when the first attempt does not work. I am also reliable, and my teachers would confirm that I have never missed a session with those students. In addition, I speak both English and Mandarin fluently, which may be helpful with visiting families.

I would be available on Saturday mornings throughout the school year, and on most weekdays during the school holidays. I could begin as soon as the training is arranged.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application with you, and I am happy to provide a reference from my form tutor.

Yours sincerely,

Lin Zhao

Commentary: The register is formal throughout and never slips: no contractions, no exclamation marks, and phrases chosen for a professional reader – “I would welcome the opportunity”, “I am happy to provide”. The qualities paragraph does the thing weak answers omit: it gives EVIDENCE for each claim rather than listing adjectives. “I am patient” alone earns little; “I am patient, and I have spent the past year helping younger students, which taught me to change my explanation when the first one fails” earns content and shows language range at the same time. Note the opening and closing convention: a named recipient takes “Yours sincerely”; an unnamed one (“Dear Sir or Madam”) takes “Yours faithfully”, and mixing them is an easy avoidable loss.

Report

I Your school is deciding how to spend money on improving the canteen. Write a report for the head teacher describing the current problems and recommending improvements.

Report on the school canteen

Introduction

This report describes the main problems with the school canteen and recommends three improvements. The information comes from a survey of ninety students in Years 10 and 11 and from my own observations over two weeks.

Current problems

The most frequent complaint, made by sixty-one of the ninety students surveyed, is the length of the queue. At present there is a single serving point, and students at the end of the queue often have fewer than ten minutes left to eat.

The second problem is the limited choice for students who do not eat meat. On three of the ten days I observed, the only vegetarian option was a cheese sandwich.

Finally, several students mentioned noise. The hard floor and ceiling make conversation difficult, and some students now eat outside even in cold weather.

Recommendations

I recommend that a second serving point is opened at lunchtime, even if it offers only cold food. This would reduce the queue substantially at a relatively low cost.

I also recommend that at least two hot vegetarian dishes are offered each day. This would benefit a growing number of students and would require no building work.

Finally, I suggest that acoustic panels are considered for the ceiling. This is the most expensive recommendation, and it may be better to see whether the shorter queues reduce the noise before spending on it.

Conclusion

The canteen serves its purpose but is uncomfortable at peak times. The first two recommendations could be introduced quickly and would address the problems most often raised by students.

Commentary: A report is judged partly on FORMAT, so the headings are not decoration – they are content credit. The register is formal and impersonal but not stiff. Two features lift this above a competent answer: it cites evidence with numbers (“sixty-one of the ninety students”), which makes the problems specific rather than asserted; and the recommendations are ranked by cost and feasibility, including an honest note that the most expensive one should perhaps wait. That judgement is exactly what a head teacher would need, and it shows the writer has understood the audience – which is what the purpose-and-audience criterion rewards.

Article and review

I Your school magazine has asked for an article on whether students should have part-time jobs. Write the article.

Should we be working after school?

Last Saturday I served coffee for six hours. My feet hurt, I got the orders wrong twice, and I earned enough to buy roughly one pair of headphones. Would I do it again? Yes – and I think more of us should.

The obvious argument against a part-time job is time. We already have homework, and teachers are quick to point out that a Saturday spent working is a Saturday not spent revising. That is true, and anyone whose grades are already slipping should probably wait. But the argument assumes that the alternative to working is studying, and for most of us the honest alternative is a phone screen.

What a job actually teaches is difficult to get anywhere else. In three months I have learned to speak to adults I have never met, to admit a mistake quickly instead of hiding it, and to keep working when I am tired and nobody is watching. No lesson has taught me those things, and every employer I ever meet will care about them.

There is also the money, and I do not think we should be shy about it. Earning your own money changes how you spend it. I have never once bought something thoughtlessly with wages I stood up for six hours to earn.

So my advice is this: if your schoolwork is under control, find a few hours a week. Choose something with real customers rather than a job hidden in a back room, and stop if it starts to cost you your grades. The headphones are not the point.

Commentary: An article must ENGAGE, and the credit follows the techniques: a title, an opening anecdote with a concrete detail, a rhetorical question, direct address to the reader, and a closing line that turns back on the opening. The argument is genuinely two-sided – it concedes the strongest objection and qualifies its own advice – which is what separates an article from an advertisement. Note the register: informal but controlled, with varied sentence lengths and no slang. Weak answers here read as an essay with a title bolted on; the difference is voice.

I Write a review of a film, book or restaurant for your school website. Describe it, give your opinion, and say whether you would recommend it.

The Lighthouse Keeper – worth the slow start

I nearly stopped reading *The Lighthouse Keeper* after forty pages. Almost nothing happens: an old man cleans a lamp, cooks the same meal, and watches the sea. If you want a story that grabs you in the first chapter, this is not it.

I am glad I continued. The novel is set on a small island off the Scottish coast, and it follows Angus, who has kept the light alone for eleven years. Then, one winter, a young woman is washed up on the rocks. What follows is not the rescue story I expected, but something quieter and better: two people who have both stopped speaking to anyone slowly learning how to again.

The writing is the best thing about it. The author describes the weather so precisely that I found myself cold, and the dialogue is realistic because there is so little of it. My one criticism is the ending, which resolves too neatly for a book that spent three hundred pages resisting neat answers.

I would recommend this to anyone who is willing to be patient, and especially to readers who liked quiet, character-driven stories. I would not recommend it to someone looking for a thriller, and I would warn any reader that the first fifty pages are a test.

Commentary: A review needs three things and this has all three: description of what it is, a clear personal OPINION with reasons, and a recommendation aimed at a specific kind of reader. The recommendation is what students most often weaken – “I recommend it to everyone” says nothing. Naming who would not enjoy it is more persuasive, not less. Note also the balanced judgement: one specific criticism, stated without hedging. A review that praises everything reads as insincere and rarely reaches the top band for content.

Discursive essay

I “Every student should learn a second language, even if they do not want to.” Write an essay giving your views.

Almost every school in the world now teaches a second language, and in many countries it is compulsory for years. Some people argue that a student who has no interest in languages is simply wasting hours that could be spent on something they care about. I believe that a second language should remain compulsory, although I accept that it should be taught differently from the way it often is.

The strongest argument for compulsory language learning is that students cannot yet know what they will need. A fourteen-year-old who dislikes French may work for a French company at thirty, and it is far harder to learn a language then. Compulsory subjects exist precisely because young people cannot predict their own futures, which is also why we require mathematics of students who dislike it.

There is also evidence that learning a second language improves understanding of the first. Students who study grammar in another language often notice, for the first time, how their own sentences are built. My own understanding of English tenses improved when I had to explain them to a classmate.

Those who disagree make a fair point about motivation. A student who resents the subject learns little, and the lessons can become a struggle for the teacher as well. However, I think this is an argument about HOW languages are taught rather than whether they should be. When a course is built around conversation, film and things students actually want to say, resistance falls sharply. My cousin hated Spanish for two years and then spent a term learning it through cooking videos; she now speaks it better than I speak French.

In conclusion, I believe a second language should stay compulsory, because students cannot predict what they will need and because the subject improves their thinking more widely. Schools should respond to the objection not by dropping the requirement but by changing the lessons, so that the students who resist are the ones the teaching reaches.

Commentary: The structure is the one examiners look for: a position stated in the introduction, two developed arguments for, one genuine counter-argument that is ANSWERED rather than mentioned, and a conclusion that follows from the argument. The counter-argument paragraph is the most valuable one in the essay, and it is the one weakest answers omit entirely. Note that the personal examples are short and used as evidence for a general claim – an essay made only of personal anecdote drifts into narrative and loses content credit. The linking is varied (“There is also”, “Those who disagree”, “However”, “In conclusion”) without becoming a list of connectives, which is a real risk when students have been taught a fixed list.