Pearson English International Certificate

Lesson Plan Ideas: Skill Building Activities

Short Writing Task (Essay)
Task Introduction

- Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks assess test takers’ writing skills.
- These tasks test the ability to address a specific question with a short, cohesive paragraph, using suitable sentence structures and vocabulary.
- Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks are included on the B1, B2, C1 and C2 tests.
- There are 1-2 Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks on each test.
- Test takers are presented with a prompt which includes a question.
- They should write their opinion on the topic in response to the question.
- They have 10 minutes to write.
- At B1 and B2 levels, test takers should write a minimum of 75 words. At C1 and C2, test takers must write at least 100 words.
- On screen, Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks look like this:

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Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

"It is better to live in the countryside than in a city."
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Total Word Count: 0
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- The prompt is visible throughout the task.
- There is a countdown timer, which counts down from 10 minutes. This is also visible throughout.
Strategies for Success

✔ Identify the main topic. When reading the prompt, test takers should first identify its main topic. For example, in the prompt above the main topic is living in the countryside or in a city.

✔ Make note of key words and brainstorm ideas. Brainstorming helps writers to generate ideas about a topic before they start writing. First, make a note of key words from the prompt. For example, in the prompt above it could be ‘live’ ‘countryside’ and ‘city’. Then, make a note of associated words and ideas. For example, next to the word ‘countryside’ test takers could write ‘rural’ ‘beautiful’ ‘quiet’ ‘farming’ etc. Test takers should spend approximately 30–60 seconds brainstorming ideas about the whole topic.

✔ Address the question. Many test takers make the mistake of writing about the prompt’s topic in a general way without paying attention to the specific question being asked. This can lead to potentially strong writers getting a lower score than they could if they paid more attention to the prompt. In the prompt above, the topic is whether it is better to live in the countryside or in a city, but the specific question asks ‘Do you agree or disagree’ that ‘It is better to live in the countryside than in a city’. Test takers therefore need to make their personal opinion clear when addressing the prompt.

✔ Check and edit your writing. Before they take the test, give your learners practice in checking and editing their work, especially for looking out for grammar, vocabulary and punctuation mistakes. Proofreading work in the final minute or so is very important. Small mistakes can have a large effect on a test taker’s score. Test takers should be made aware of this and should be given practice checking their work within the time limit.

✔ Look for opportunities to improve work. While proofreading, test takers should also be looking for opportunities to make their work better. For example, they should look for places where they could display a wider range of vocabulary by adding more details. They also should look for opportunities to make their ideas clearer by adding an example or an explanation.

✔ Manage time effectively. Help your learners get used to writing under timed conditions and managing their time effectively. They should work out how much time to allocate for planning, writing and checking their essay.
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for all learners**

All learners should also be helped to understand the requirements of the task. Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks require test takers to write a minimum number of words within a time limit. To get your learners ready for the test, help them to develop their written fluency by having them write regularly in class and at home. They should practise writing under timed conditions and addressing specific essay questions. They should also practise planning and proofreading their own writing.

### Understanding the task

After introducing the format of Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks to your learners and explaining the Strategies for Success on page 3, check that they have understood by using the following activities

#### Jumbled sentences

Rearrange the words to create sentences about Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks.

1) must address test a takers essays specific in question their
2) a write cohesive takers paragraph test should
3) important is appropriate it sentence use structures and to vocabulary
4) task ten have the test to minutes takers complete

**Answers:** 1) ‘Test takers must address a specific question in their essays.’ 2) ‘Test takers should write a cohesive paragraph.’ 3) ‘It is important to use appropriate sentence structures and vocabulary.’ Or ‘It is important to use appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures.’ 4) ‘Test takers have ten minutes to complete the task.’

#### Gap-fill summary

Write in 1–3 word(s) to fill each gap.

Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks require test takers to express their (i) ________ about a topic. B1 and B2 levels, test takers should write a (ii) ________ of 75 words. At C1 and C2, test takers must write at least (iii) ________. Not only should answers relate to the topic of the prompt, importantly they must also (iv) ________ the specific question. It is important that test takers manage (v) ________ effectively during this task. After brainstorming the topic, then planning and writing an answer to the question, it is essential to save time for (vi) ________ at the end.

**Answers:** (i) opinion (ii) minimum (iii) 100 words/one hundred words (iv) address (v) (their) time (vi) brainstorming/checking work
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for B1/B2**

B1 learners can write short, simple essays on topics of interest and can summarise, report and give his/her opinion about accumulated factual information with some confidence. At B2 level, learners can write an essay or report that develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail. Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks test these writing skills. You can help your learners prepare for the test by using the B1 example task below and other practice tasks on page 13.

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**Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.**

“It is better to live in the countryside than in a city.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Sample Answer:** I disagree with this statement. In my opinion, it is much better to live in a city than in the countryside because there is a lot of things to do in cities. For example, there is a wide variety of different shops and restaurants. I think that city life is very pleasant for people. I also believe that there are more opportunities for jobs in the city. In the countryside, many people farm the land and if you don’t want to do that job, there are not many other things you can do. For all these reasons, I much prefer living in a busy city, and I think it’s better than living in the countryside.
Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for B1/B2

In my opinion...

Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks require test takers to brainstorm ideas about a topic and express their opinions. Learners need to get used coming up with ideas about topics quickly so that they can effectively divide their time between brainstorming, planning, writing and checking their work. To get your class in the habit of doing this, create a set of cards, each with one topic written on it. The topics should be familiar to your learners and of a type that they are likely to have an opinion about. For example, you could use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>climate change</th>
<th>homework</th>
<th>school uniform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>electric cars</td>
<td>illegal music downloads</td>
<td>violent TV shows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Divide your class into pairs and give each pair a set of cards face-down. It is useful for each pair to have a timer: you could ask learners to use their phones for this. If this isn’t possible, learners can simply count down aloud.

One learner should turn over the first card and, holding it, show it to their partner. Their partner then has a small amount of time in which they must express their opinion about the topic and give a reason for it. (2, 5 or 10 seconds usually work best for the time limit, which you can set according to your learners’ needs and the difficulty level of the topics you use.) After turning the card, the learner holding it is responsible for monitoring the time. Points are awarded when opinions are expressed successfully. If learners fail to express their opinion within the time limit, they do not.

As a follow-up, ask learners to select one of the topics they have expressed their opinion about and to then write a short paragraph explaining and supporting their opinion with examples.
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for B1/B2**

**Comparison cards**

Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks often ask test takers to make some kind of comparison. For example, they may need to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of a particular trend or practice before stating their own opinion. They may also need to compare and contrast two different activities before evaluating which is best. To help your learners prepare for doing this, it is important to develop their knowledge of sentence structures (e.g. ... is larger than... ...is more difficult than... ...is less common than...) and vocabulary related to comparisons (‘slightly’ ‘considerably’ ‘similarly’ etc.)

Once you have reviewed relevant language, you can then practice using it with ‘Comparison cards’. This involves students linking nouns together by making comparative sentences.

First, create a list of nouns/topics you would like your learners to practise comparing. For lower-level learners, you could use simple things like vehicles and animals. For more advanced learners, you could use different kinds of energy source or actions to address a problem. Write each on a separate card. Then, divide the class into pairs and give each pair a set of noun cards. The pair should shuffle the cards and then deal them so they both have the same number.

One learner goes first by putting one of their cards face-up on the table. Their partner must then put down one of their cards and make a sentence comparing the two things. For example, if the first learner puts down ‘fossil fuels’ and their partner could put down ‘electric cars’ and say ‘electric cars may help us to use less fossil fuels’.

Like dominoes, the activity continues with the learner who went first then putting down another noun card and needing to create a sentence of their own. The new word/topic can be linked to any of the topics already present on the table. For example, if the learner puts down ‘solar power’ they can either make a sentence comparing it to ‘fossil fuels’ or ‘electric cars’.

This continues until either a) a learner makes a grammatical mistake of some kind or b) a learner cannot put down another noun card and make a suitable sentence. You can award points when learners manage to put down all of their cards. Once the activity ends, you can set follow-up writing tasks involving learners writing about the topics they have compared.
**Short Writing Task (Essay):**
Activities for B1/B2

**Find and fix the sentence**

Proofreading and error correction skills are important when test takers do Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks. To help your learners develop these skills, you can create short texts containing a range of spelling and grammatical errors and set your learners the task of finding and correcting the mistakes. You can scaffold learners’ development of these skills by starting with short texts of one or two sentences containing just one or two errors, building up to use longer texts with more errors for them to find.

Make the activities competitive to engage your learners and get them used to the time pressures of completing Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks in the test. You can tell the class how many errors there are and then challenge them to race each other to be the first to find all of the errors. Alternatively, you can set a time limit and ask learners to find and correct as many errors as they can within the given time.

Once your learners are familiar with the task, try to use texts that resemble the kinds of essay they will produce in Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks. You could use their own work for this if you think they will be able to find their own mistakes.
Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 100 words.

“People who spend time using social media develop a greater sense of empathy than those who do not.”

Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why or why not?

**Sample Answer:** The premise that social media enables people from diverse backgrounds to interact in ways which ordinarily would not be possible seems flawed. Social media usage doesn’t automatically increase people’s empathy. While social media can expose people to different views, this isn’t always the case. For instance, some social media platforms have algorithms so that users are mainly sent notifications about topics that they have already liked before. Therefore, not all users encounter fresh perspectives. Reading something on social media is far removed from understanding another person’s life experiences, especially as people often present themselves in an inauthentic way online. Genuine empathy comes from spending meaningful time with others. That’s why I support social engagement in a community rather than using social media.
Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for C1/C2

Complete the counterargument

At C1 and C2 level, learners are likely to be comfortable expressing their opinions using a variety of language. They should also have had some experience writing examples and explanations. To boost the quality of their writing further, you can focus on the use of counterargument within argumentative essays. First, help them understand the role of counterargument by showing this example:

*National governments should provide higher education free of charge to the most talented students. Some might argue that this would be too much of a financial drain. It is true that governments have a large number of spending priorities. However, any government’s priority should be helping people to fulfil their potential and this measure is the only way to ensure that academically gifted students without the financial resources can continue their education.*

Sentence 1 = Writer’s view
Sentence 2 = Showing counterargument
Sentence 3 = Conceding a point
Sentence 4 = Refuting counterargument

Create/find other texts that contain counterarguments and ask your learners to label the different elements in this way.

Once you have highlighted the way acknowledging counterargument can be used to strengthen an opinion, you should then give your learners the opportunity to practise brainstorming and writing counterarguments. For this, you can use topic cards with topics like ‘School uniform’ or ‘vaccine mandates’ and ask learners to brainstorm and write their own opinion as well as counterarguments. Alternatively, you could use the practice tasks on page 5 and ask learners to write responses that include showing a counterargument, conceding a point and refuting the counterargument. Although the C1 practice tasks are more similar to the tasks that learners of this level will encounter in the test, you are likely to find that the lower-level practice tasks can also be used to help your learners practise including counterarguments in their writing.
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for C1/C2**

*For example... Alternative ways to give examples*

Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks require test takers to support their opinions while also demonstrating their range of vocabulary. Help your learners to do this effectively by introducing different phrases/sentence structures for giving examples. At C1 and C2 levels, they are likely to be very familiar with using ‘for example’ and ‘such as’ but they should practise alternative ways to give opinions. Here is some alternative language they could use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A/An</th>
<th>classic</th>
<th>important</th>
<th>example of this is...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interesting</td>
<td>notable</td>
<td>well-known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“..., for instance/including...”

“This is exemplified by...”

Once you have taught your class some alternative ways to give examples, ask them to search online or in their own work for instances of writers using the phrases ‘for example’ and ‘such as’. When they find one, they should then rewrite the sentence(s) by replacing these more common phrases with one of the alternative phrases/sentence structures you have taught. Challenge learners to find and rewrite as many sentences as they can within a specific time limit.
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Activities for C1/C2**

**Peer review**

Encouraging peer review is an effective way to help C1 and C2 learners hone their proofreading, an important skill when doing Short Writing Task (Essay) tasks. Some learners are more comfortable and motivated than others critiquing their peers’ work. Although it will be sometimes sufficient to simply ask them to look at a partner’s essay and find errors/areas to improve, it is usually more effective to guide peer review by setting specific targets; e.g. ‘Find two grammatical errors’ or ‘Identify one sentence where a higher-level word could be used’. After learners have looked at their partner’s work, it is useful to have them discuss their comments in pairs, supporting each other’s development. To ensure that these discussions are a positive experience, peer review should be structured to encourage praise as well as facilitate constructive criticism. In addition to asking learners to highlight errors in each other’s work, you could use a peer review checklist like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Review Checklist</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Somewhat (State issue)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the essay divided into paragraphs?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the essay begin with a suitable introduction?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the essay end with a suitable conclusion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the main point clear?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the point supported by example/explanation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the main strengths?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are the main areas for improvement?

Checklists like this can be adapted to focus on specific aspects of writing. For example, you could include a question like ‘Does the essay include acknowledgement of a counter argument?’ if writing counterarguments is something you have recently covered in class.
Short Writing Task (Essay): Practice Tasks

B1

Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

“Schools should teach students useful skills like how to apply for a job or how to open a bank account.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer: I completely agree that schools should teach students practical life skills. I think schools today are too focused on teaching academic subjects and preparing students for university. However, there is not enough focus on teaching really useful skills that students will need in adult life. Many students leave home to go to university. They may know how to write an academic essay, but some don’t even know how to cook for themselves or how to handle things like paying rent or other bills.

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Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

“There is nothing positive about car use. Cars are destroying the planet and affecting people’s fitness.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer: I don’t agree with this statement because cars are an important part of everyday life. They are necessary for our work and social lives. However, I do think people use cars too much. For example, people may use them for short journeys when they could easily walk or cycle instead. This would improve people’s fitness and they wouldn’t have to experience bad traffic every day. It would also stop pollution levels from increasing. I believe people need to start using cars for essential journeys only. This will have a positive effect on people’s health and the environment.
Short Writing Task (Essay): Practice Tasks

B1

Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

“Shopping online is the most enjoyable way to buy products."

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer: Online shopping sometimes saves people time and it makes it easier to find products. However, I think visiting shops is a far nicer experience. Shopping online isn’t a social activity. When you go to a shopping centre, you can spend the day with your friends and family to enjoy time together. In addition, your friends can give you advice so that you make the right choice. Shopping online isn’t fun because you don’t have the opportunity to try the products or see what they are like in reality. For this reason, I think it makes buying products less interesting.

Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

“It is useful for everyone to learn at least two foreign languages."

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer: In my opinion, everyone should learn two or three foreign languages. They should start when they are at school, because young children are very good at learning languages. I don’t think it’s enough to learn just one language. Lots of people learn English, but how do we know that English will always be the world’s international language? This might change in the future. That is why it is sensible to learn other languages as well, for example Chinese or Arabic.
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Practice Tasks**

**B2**

Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

“As more and more people do most of their shopping online these days, there is no need for physical shops in the streets.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Sample answer:** It is certainly true that more and more people are shopping online these days. After all, it’s obvious that there are benefits. You don’t have to worry about parking, which is becoming more challenging with our overcrowded cities and towns. And, of course, you can get items online cheaper than in a shop, as there are fewer expenses for the business owner, resulting in better prices. But I really don’t agree that shops have no place. Shops serve an important social function. For older people, meeting people while out shopping gives them human contact, and shops sometimes provide public noticeboards where customers share information.

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Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.

“It is better for people to take holidays in their own country than to travel abroad on holiday.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Sample answer:** I disagree with this statement, although it is important to recognise that there are some advantages to taking holidays in one’s own country. For example, transportation makes travelling in your own country far cheaper, and in many cases it is better for the environment. Additionally, there is no language barrier. However, I still believe taking holidays abroad is beneficial. It allows you to discover new cultures and cuisines, giving you a better understanding of the world. Overall, it’s true that travel broadens the mind, so I firmly believe it is important for people to take holidays abroad.
**Short Writing Task (Essay): Practice Tasks**

**B2**

**Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.**

“People using their cars too much has had a negative effect on society.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Sample answer:** Cars play an important part in our lives and it is difficult to imagine life without them. It is true to say that there are many negative aspects of car use. For example, cars are bad for people’s health due to the pollution they create, and the fact that many people use a car for every journey which prevents them from getting any exercise.

However, there are also many positives. For instance, cars enable people to travel long distances and improves lives of people with disabilities.

In conclusion, I do not agree that using cars has only negative effects on us.

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**Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 75 words.**

“People should learn the rules of the road through cycling before they start learning to drive a car.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Sample answer:** In my opinion this would seem to be a very good way of enabling people to develop more road awareness in a safer and perhaps simpler way. Once they have managed to learn about how best to turn, to follow traffic signs and to engage with other road users on their bikes, they will then be able to use that knowledge with greater facility when they commence driving a car. So, if drivers can learn the rules of the road before they ever get into a car, this will prepare them better to become safer, more knowledgeable drivers.
Short Writing Task (Essay): Practice Tasks

C1

Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 100 words.

“Space exploration is a waste of financial resources that could be put to far better use for humankind.”

Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer:

While there’s no denying that space exploration costs huge sums of money, the benefits we derive outweigh the costs. Space exploration provides us with knowledge not only about space, but also about our own planet, which can be used to improve the lives of everyone.

Space exploration enables scientists to study the Earth. Satellite images taken while orbiting the planet reveal essential scientific information about weather patterns and environmental destruction. This helps climate scientists understand more about global warming.

Space exploration also serves as a source of inspiration and imagination for the younger generation. These youngsters may then go on to study science for the benefit of the entire world. Therefore, I disagree that funding space exploration is a waste of money.
Short Writing Task (Essay):  
Practice Tasks

C1

Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 100 words.

“Although there are many reasons for preserving forests, some level of deforestation might be needed in order to provide food for people.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer:

In order to feed a growing population, it is important for us to come up with sustainable solutions to grow food. However, I strongly disagree that deforestation is a necessary or even logical solution. Forests, particularly large areas of virgin rainforests, are the lungs of our planet. Destroying woodlands exacerbates climate change, leading to all sorts of problems, which are often most keenly felt by the poorest and most vulnerable. There is plenty of arable land available in many parts of the world. Other potential solutions may include growing crops vertically in towers or skyscrapers. Perhaps if less food was wasted, it would not be necessary to produce quite as much food as we do now.
**Short Writing Task (Essay):**

**Practice Tasks**

C1

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**Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 100 words.**

“When it comes to achieving success in life, hard work plays a much more important role than talent.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Sample answer:**

Whatever your definition of success, hard work is its integral component. I agree that while talent may of course help people achieve their goals in certain circumstances, hard work is the key element.

In most cases, diligence and determination can go a long way to compensate for a person’s relative lack of ability. There are plenty of examples of athletes who have achieved professional success because of their willingness to train at every opportunity. In many cases, these athletes’ achievements have surpassed those of athletes who could be considered more gifted by nature. Without hard work and dedication, even the most talented individuals can squander their natural gifts.

In conclusion, while talent provides people with a useful foundation upon which to build, I believe success in life generally comes from hard work.
Read the question. You have 10 minutes to write your response. You must write at least 100 words.

“It is preferable to spend a few years living on your own before committing to a full-time relationship with someone.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Sample answer:

Sample answer: Having time living on one’s own can be hugely beneficial. It’s a chance to be truly independent and develop the practical skills needed in everyday life, such as cooking and budgeting. It’s also an opportunity to gain some insight into who you are as an individual. There is no need to mould yourself into someone or compromise with anyone else. This can make you stronger and better able to commit to relationships later on.

However, a person may become too set in their ways and unwilling to compromise or share their space. Committing to a relationship is about wanting to share your life with a special someone.

On the whole, I believe the advantages of a period of independence outweigh the disadvantages, as long as the person takes care not to become inflexible.
Be yourself in English.