

Getting Ready for the Benchmark Writing Test by Paul Fournier

The benchmarks measure what you would do in a real-life writing task. You should try to **imagine the situation** and write as well as you can to impress someone, for example, a potential employer.

Choosing the task

You might have to choose from among tasks that do not have the same number of words. Choose a task you understand and that can help you give your best performance, not the shortest or longest one. Respect the task or your score could be lower.

Organising

In a well-organised, coherent text for the benchmark writing test, you should:

Choose relevant ideas

Match your text to the situation: *topic, type of text, purpose and audience*

- *topic*: the subject of your text
- *type of text*: some elements of content are expected for each type of text (See *Types* p. 3 below)
- *purpose*: your reason for writing (For example: to inform? request? convince? argue?)
- *audience*: the reader(s): For example: An employer? A college administrator? The general public (for example, the reader of a work-related blog)?

Include enough ideas to meet all the requirements of the task. Each idea must address the topic and contribute to the purpose.

Make sure each idea is credible.

- Can a reader believe what you are saying?
 - For intermediate and advanced ratings, do not refer to personal experience or common knowledge (things that almost everybody knows).
 - Develop and support each idea with facts or convincing arguments.

Guide your reader to your ending

Organise your ideas logically. This will make it easy for the reader to see how each idea leads to what your concluding elements say.

Connect your ideas

Use transition words that show how your ideas go together

Confirm what is important to remember from your text in your concluding elements.

For example, in a report or business email: action expected from the reader; in an essay or a story: point of view, expectation.

Structure

Follow the conventional format of the type of text (e.g. opinion piece, formal email, short report, instructions). In addition to format, most types of texts usually include:

Introductory elements

 Paragraphs

Concluding elements

*presenting the context (task, audience, purpose)
a topic sentence*

*support
expectations*

Note that some texts may have a different structure, for instance when giving instructions, explaining a process or telling a story.

Using appropriate vocabulary

Bring a paper dictionary as no online dictionary will be available. You will not be able to use electronic help in any form.

Look up words in your dictionary to find the appropriate term

Make your text clear and accurate by checking if the word you chose works in the context.

When a text has to be polite and formal, *show that you can use language that is appropriate to writing*, not just to speaking.

To get an advanced benchmark, you must be able to ***adjust your vocabulary to the readership***.

Make sure the tone, style and word choice are appropriate for the intended reader(s), purpose and conventional format of the type of text.

Checking grammar and spelling

No grammar checker or spell checker will be available.

Use proper grammar, syntax (sentence structure) and spelling to help make your text clear and easy to follow.

The people correcting your text will consider how easy it is to read. If they often have to stop and guess what you are trying to say, your benchmark will be lower.

Pay attention to verb tenses and forms

Verbs help the reader place the action or events in time. They show how to interpret an idea in relation to the other ideas.

Double-check your spelling. Poor spelling might get you an intermediate benchmark when everything else that you write is advanced or might limit you to a beginner instead of intermediate.

To improve your benchmark ratings:

Correctly use complex forms and structures (for example, noun modifying noun: *car makers*, verbs: *could have decided...*) when the context makes it appropriate.

Mistakes do not have a percentage value on the test but **if the text is not clear or hard to read** because of your mistakes, you will get a lower benchmark.

Types of texts

In addition to proper structure, some elements of content are expected for each type of text in the benchmark writing test. Formatting is not necessary. For example, you do not need to include an address if you write a letter, but you should include a salutation and closing.

Note: *Beginners pick from among the easiest types of texts below.*

Anecdote, note, story, informal email

- A text that usually describes or narrates

Article for a brochure, serious magazine, newspaper, informative website

A fact-filled text that informs the reader and may include *how-to* (process, instructions)

Blog, forum contributions, comment

In the context of the test, the text should be a relatively formal and structured point of view.

Formal email or letter

Often related to work or college, a text that describes a situation and requests action. It should include a proper salutation and closing.

Report

In the context of the test, the text should either:

- present a specific problem, situation or task to be described;
- or, provide a clear overall view of an issue.

The text may often present actions or possible solutions, or suggest improvements by comparing ideas or explaining a process.

Proposal

A text that describes a project or idea for which funding or permission is required

Academic essay

A structured opinion, usually an argumentative text, developed from a thesis statement. It contains ideas expressed in topic sentences, each contributing to the argument, that lead to a conclusion that closes the argument.

Important Benchmarks Information

The Benchmarks for the four skills :

http://www.grasset.qc.ca/eslcoordination/benchmarks/Quebec_College_ESL_Benchmarks_v200806_2.pdf

Student's Guide :

http://www.elscq.qc.ca/PDF/GuideEleves_ELSCQ_v20110314.pdf

Getting Ready for Writing :



http://www.grasset.qc.ca/eslcoordination/benchmarks/PDF/GettingReadyForTheWritingTest_v20100330.pdf

Video Examples :

<http://www.elscq.qc.ca/videos.htm>