Tips for exam success

The Student's Book offers plenty of exam-style activities and tips throughout the units that lead to success in exams, particularly school-leaving ones. To get more information, read these full, more detailed tips for exam success, organised by unit and task type.

Reading

Multiple matching (units 1 and 9)

In this type of activity, you have to say which text or part of a text contains a piece of information or answers a question.

Step 1: Read all the texts or parts of the text quickly to get a general understanding.

Step 2: Read the piece(s) of information that you need to find. Underline key words in the questions. Are there any special words that help you to find the text or part of the text which contains the information? Remember that in the text the same information will probably be expressed with different words.

Step 3: Read the specific text or part of the text where you think the information comes in more detail. It can be useful to underline the section of the text where you think the answer is.

Step 4: If you are not sure that you have found the correct answer, carefully read other sections again.

Step 5: When you finish, check that you have an answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

Use of English

Word-formation cloze (units 1 and 7)

In this type of activity you must use the word given to form a word that fits in the gap. The words can be any type – noun, adjective, adverb or verb.

Step 1: Read the text once quickly to know the general meaning.

Step 2: When you look closer at each gap, read to the end of the sentence, not just to the end of the line. This will help you to decide if you need to change the meaning of the word, e.g. making it negative. Usually to change the meaning of the word you will need a prefix (e.g. *im-*, *re-*).

Step 3: Then look carefully at the words just before and after the gap. They can help you to decide what type of word you need. Usually to change the type of word you will need a suffix (e.g. *-ion* to make a noun, *-ly* to make an adverb).

Step 4: Remember that you may need to change the spelling of the word they give you. For example, from the word STRONG you may need to make the noun STRENGTH. Also, look carefully to decide if your word needs to be in the singular or plural form. If the word is a verb, put it in the correct form according to the context.

Step 5: Read the completed sentence and check your answer.

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Listening

Completing sentences or notes (units 1, 6 and 10)

In this type of activity you listen to a text and complete sentences or notes with the correct information. Be careful, because in some cases there is a maximum number of words that you can use, and you may have to use exactly the same words that you hear.

- Always read the incomplete notes *before* you listen. This helps you to know what to listen for. Look carefully at the words that come just before or after each space and think about what *type* of word is missing (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc.). But be careful. If you know that you need a number, for example, do not simply write the first number that you hear.
- It is not usually necessary to understand every word that you hear. Listen out for the sections which correspond to the information in the notes. Then pay special attention to these sections. Remember that you may not hear the exact words that appear in the incomplete notes.
- For most spaces you need to write between one and three words. Usually it is a good idea to write the words you actually hear. Be careful with spelling and make sure that what you write fits in grammatically with the words that come before and after the space.
- Don't worry if you don't understand everything the first time you listen. Usually you listen twice. Use the second listening to find the answers you didn't hear the first time and to check the answers you already have.

Writing

Stories

- Before you write a story, make a plan. Make sure that your story has a beginning, a middle and an end. Sometimes you can change the order of these three sections in a story, but always make sure the sequence of events and the chronology are clear. We can use linkers of time and sequence to do this.
- Make the main events of the story clear. What happened? Why? What happened later? How did the story end? We usually use the past simple for this.
- Give background information so that we know about the characters and the situation. We usually use the past perfect simple and continuous for this.
- Make the story interesting by describing scenes in detail. We often use the past continuous for this.
- Short sections of direct speech can bring your story to life, as can the descriptive use of adjectives, adverbs and similes.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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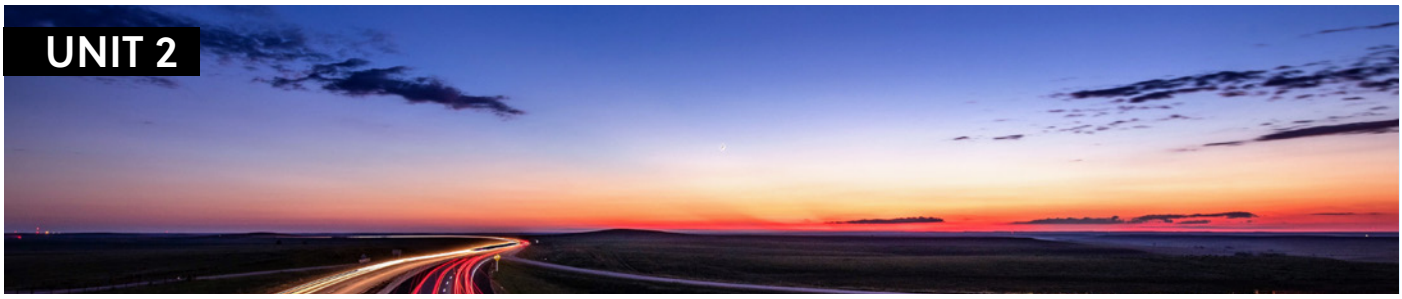

Use of English

Multiple-choice cloze

In cloze activities you have a text with gaps. Sometimes there are different options and you must choose the best for each space.

We call these multiple-choice cloze activities.

Step 1: Read the text or sentence to get a general idea of the overall meaning. Do not worry about the gaps at first. This is to get a general understanding.

Step 2: Read more carefully and try to predict which word comes in each gap. Look especially at the words which come just before and after the gap. Do those words need a special preposition? Is an article or auxiliary verb missing? Think about the type of word you need (noun, verb, pronoun, article, etc.) and the general meaning.

Step 3: Look at the alternatives. Is one of them the same as the word you thought of in Step 2? Be careful because often the meaning of the different options can be very similar, but the difference may be that each word goes with a different preposition or typically goes with another word (called collocation).

Step 4: If you aren't sure which answer is right, think about why other answers are definitely wrong and eliminate them.

Step 5: When you finish, check that you have an answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

Listening

Multiple choice

In this type of activity you choose the best answer from three or four different answers.

You usually hear the text twice. The questions are usually (but not always!) in the order that you hear them in the recording.

Step 1: Read the different answers before you listen. They can give you ideas about the topic of the text and the vocabulary you are going to hear in it. Remember that sometimes the difference between two answers is just one word.

Step 2: When you listen, remember that you may hear the correct answer but expressed in different words. You may also hear a word or words that come in one of the possible answers, but this does not mean it is the answer. The word(s) may be there just to distract you.

Step 3: You usually hear the recording twice. Do not panic if you do not understand information the first time. If you don't hear the answer to one question, start listening immediately for the answer to the next question.

Step 4: Use the second listening to find the answers you didn't hear the first time and to check the answers you already have.

Step 5: When you finish, check that you have an answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

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Speaking

Discussing photos (units 2 and 8)

In this type of activity you have one or more photos to discuss and answer a question or questions about the photo(s) or related to the same topic.

- Listen very carefully to the examiner's instructions. Your marks will depend on completing the whole task, so if you only complete one part, you will lose marks. If you aren't sure that you have understood what the examiner says, ask them to repeat.
- If you have two or more photos, you shouldn't describe each photo in great detail. The important thing is to compare and contrast the two photos.
- Don't just describe the photos, make speculations about them.
- Try to speak for exactly the right amount of time. The more you practise, the easier it will become.
- Give your own opinion if the examiner asks for it and give reasons to justify your opinions. There is not usually a right or wrong answer. The examiner wants to hear you speak English.
- Try to use a wide range of grammar and vocabulary to show the examiners what you know.
- Speak loudly and clearly so that the examiner can hear you.
- Don't let mistakes stop you from speaking. Correct your own mistakes if possible, or start the sentence again, but don't stop completely.
- Use *Well*, *Hmm* or *Let me think* to give you time to think of what you want to say next.

Writing

Opinion essays

- In opinion essays you can just give your own side of the argument. You do not have to present both sides of an argument, although you can state arguments against your opinion and then give counterarguments to defend your opinion.
- Before you begin, decide your opinion and the points you want to make. Think about how to organise these points in a logical way.
- In the conclusion, we do not usually present new ideas or opinions. We restate the major point(s) already made.
- The style in opinion essays should be formal or neutral.
- Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. The examiner wants to see that you can write and express yourself clearly and effectively.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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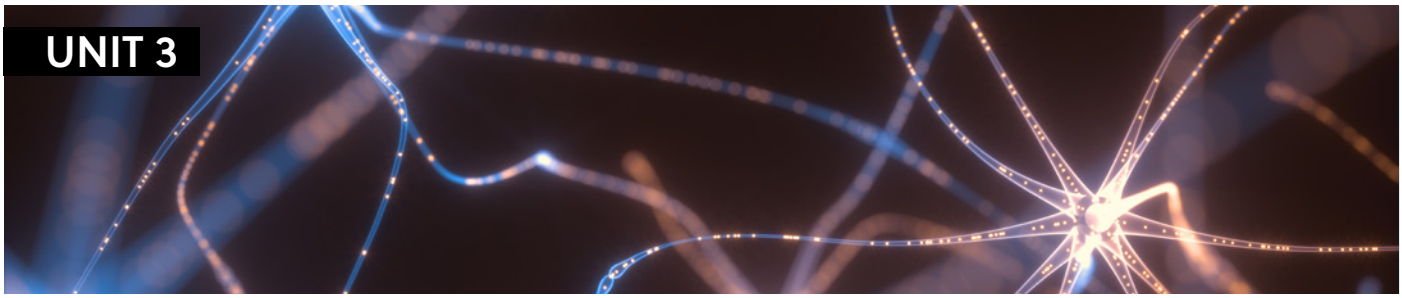

Reading

Multiple choice (units 3 and 7)

In this type of activity you read a text, or several short texts, and answer questions about it/them by choosing the best answer from three or four different options. You must choose the correct option according to the information in the text, not according to your own opinion or prior knowledge of the topic.

Step 1: Read the text quickly to get a general understanding.

Step 2: Read all the answers carefully. Sometimes the difference between two options is just one word.

Step 3: Find the section of the text where you think each answer comes and read it again slowly, in more detail. You may find the same words in the text and in one of the options, but this does not mean it is the correct answer. The correct option will probably express the information in the text using different words. Sometimes the question is not about facts but about opinions, attitudes or feelings, so be ready to 'read between the lines'. The answers usually come in order in the text.

Step 4: If you aren't 100% sure which answer is best, take away any answers which you know are not correct.

Step 5: When you finish, check that you have an answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

Listening

Multiple matching (units 3 and 8)

In this type of activity you match different speakers with the information, ideas and/or attitudes that they express. If there are two tasks in the same activity, you may hear the answer to the second task before the answer to the first one.

Before you listen,

- think about the topic of what you are going to listen to. Think of words that could appear in the listening text.
- read the questions and underline important information. This can help you to know what the people may say and helps you to concentrate more while you listen.

While you listen,

- remember that the speakers may say the same things as in the questions, but using different words or expressions. Remember also that other speakers may use the actual words that come in the questions, but there is only one correct answer for each speaker.
- sometimes you have to identify the speaker's attitude. In this case you need to interpret not only what the person is saying but also why and how he/she is saying it.
- don't worry if you don't understand everything the first time you listen. Usually you listen twice. Use the second listening to find the answers you didn't hear the first time and to check the answers you already have.

After you listen,

- check that you have an answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

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Speaking

Giving a presentation

In this type of activity, you have to talk about a topic which could appear in the form of a question, title, text or photo. Often the topic is a general one, but in some exams you need to talk about personal experiences. You usually have a fixed amount of time to prepare the presentation and to give it.

- Make notes with the information you want to give in your presentation and use them when you are giving it. *But* don't just read your notes aloud.
- Look at your audience. See if they understand you and are interested.
- Don't speak too fast. If you speak too quickly, people will not be able to follow you.
- Try to speak for exactly the right amount of time. The more you practise, the easier it will become.
- Often you will be asked further questions after your presentation. This is not because there was a problem with your presentation. It is usually to check that you can speak spontaneously on the topic, too.
- Use intonation to show that you are interested and to make others interested.
- Don't worry excessively about vocabulary. When you don't know a word, explain it or use a simpler word.
- Don't let mistakes stop you from speaking. Correct your own mistakes if possible, or start the sentence again, but don't stop completely.
- Remember that if you are talking about personal experiences, the examiner is less interested in the actual experiences than in the way you express yourself in English.

Writing

Reviews

- The important thing in a review is to give a clear picture of the thing that you are reviewing and to make your own opinion and attitude clear. To do this, use a wide variety of adjectives and adverbs and use expressions of opinion.
- The style in a review should not be particularly formal or informal.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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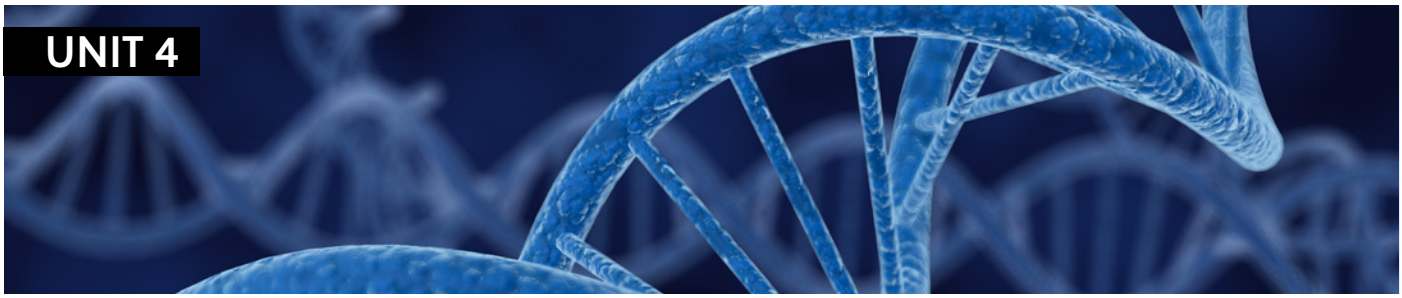

Reading

Missing paragraphs

In this type of exercise you have to find the best place to put different paragraphs (or sentences) taken from a text. There are usually one or two more paragraphs than spaces.

Step 1: Read the text to get a general idea of the overall meaning.

Step 2: Read the missing paragraphs and identify the key information. What is the paragraph about? Do you remember any other paragraphs connected with this topic when you read the text for the first time? Look again at this part of the text in more detail.

Step 3: Look for words and phrases in the first or last sentences in the paragraph which connect with the information that comes in the text just before or after each gap.

Step 4: Try out each paragraph in the most probable space and continue reading. Is the meaning logical? Do pronouns like *this* or *it* make sense, or linking words like *and, but* or *although*? Look also for ideas that are repeated from one paragraph to the next by using synonyms.

Step 5: If there are gaps which you cannot complete, continue with other, easier gaps first and then go back later to the difficult ones.

Step 6: When you finish, read the completed text again to check that it makes sense.

Use of English

Sentence transformations (units 4 and 8)

In this type of activity you have a sentence and you must complete a second sentence so that it means the same as the original sentence. Usually you must use a word that they give. In this case, you cannot change the form of this word. In most exams, you can only use between two and six words, including the word they give you. Find out in your exam whether contractions such as *can't* or *don't* count as two words or one.

Step 1: Read the original sentence carefully. Think about the meaning of the sentence, the type of structure(s) used, the tense(s) used, etc.

Step 2: If they give you a word, think about its meaning. Think also about the grammatical function of the word. Does it always or usually go with another word or tense?

Step 3: Write your sentence. Do not add or change any other words unnecessarily. They may change the meaning of the sentence or make you write too many words.

Step 4: When you finish, check that you have:

a not changed the meaning from the original sentence.

b not changed the form of the word they gave you.

c not written more than the maximum number of words permitted.

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Speaking

Talking about statistics

In this type of activity you have to talk about different things such as graphs, photos, charts, statistics, headlines and quotes. These things are all usually connected to one general topic.

Step 1: Look at all the stimuli and decide what the general topic is.

Step 2: Check that you understand the content of each different stimulus.

Step 3: Make notes with your ideas. Look at these notes and refer to them when you speak, but do not read them aloud. React to what the examiner asks you.

Remember:

- Give your opinion or interpretation of the topic and stimuli. There is not usually a right or wrong answer. The examiner wants to hear you speak English.
- Don't describe every detail of the information. Decide what you think are the most important and interesting facts.
- If you don't understand what the examiner says, ask them in English to repeat or to speak more slowly. Use expressions like: *Sorry, can you say that again?* or, *Sorry, could you speak more slowly?*
- Speak loudly and clearly so that the examiner can hear you.
- Don't worry excessively about vocabulary. When you don't know a word, explain it or use a simpler word.
- Don't let mistakes stop you from speaking. Correct your own mistakes if possible, or start the sentence again, but don't stop completely.
- Use *Well*, *Hmm* or *Let me think* to give you time to think of what you want to say next.

Writing

For-and-against essays

- In for-and-against essays you must present both sides of an argument.
- In for-and-against essays you should have a number of relevant points to make. Think about how to organise these points in a logical way. A common way of doing this is to have one main paragraph giving one side of the argument and another paragraph presenting the other side. In the conclusion, you can summarise both sides and give your own opinion.
- A typical way of beginning a for -and-against essay is by talking about the current situation and mentioning the fact that people have different opinions on the topic because it is complex or controversial.
- You must always justify the arguments you present.
- The style in for-and-against and opinion essays should be formal.
- Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. The examiner wants to see that you can write and express yourself clearly and effectively.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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Reading

True/false

In this type of activity you decide if statements are true or false according to the information in the text.

Step 1: Read the text quickly to get a general understanding.

Step 2: Read the sentences that you need to prove true or false.

Step 3: Find the parts of the text where you think the information comes. Read them again in more detail. Remember that the statements will probably not be expressed the same way as in the text. Decide what the key words are in each statement and try to find similar ideas in the text.

Step 4: When you finish, check that you have an answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

Use of English

Open cloze (units 5 and 10)

In cloze activities you have a text with gaps. When there are no options given, we call them open cloze activities. You must fill in each gap by thinking of a word which is grammatically correct and is logical.

Step 1: Read the complete text or sentences without thinking about the gaps.

Step 2: Look again at the gaps and especially the words which come just before and after the gap. Do those words need a special preposition? Is an article or auxiliary verb missing? Think about the type of word you need (noun, verb, pronoun, article, etc.) and the general meaning. The spaces in cloze activities will often be for prepositions, articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, modal verbs and conjunctions (*and, but, although*, etc.). Also remember that some words typically go with other words. We call this collocation.

Step 3: Fill in the gap with the word that you think is best. Read again with your answer in the gap. Sometimes you will need to read a larger section of text to know what word is missing. If there is more than one possible answer, you only need to put one.

Step 4: When you finish, check that you have one answer for each question. Never leave answers blank in an exam.

Speaking

Debates

In debates, you are given a topic or situation and you need to discuss it and defend your point of view.

- Before you begin, make sure you understand the topic or situation you have to debate. If you aren't sure, ask for clarification before you begin.
- Make sure you listen carefully to the arguments the person debating with you uses. You can agree, disagree, make suggestions or ask questions.
- Make eye contact with the person you are speaking to and speak loudly and clearly.
- If you can prepare beforehand, make notes, but use them only for reference. Never read your notes aloud.
- If you are working with other students, be sensitive. Don't talk for too long without giving your partners a chance to speak.
- In some debates, you must come to an agreement, but in others it is not necessary. Make sure you know before you begin.
- There are no right or wrong answers in debates. The important thing is to talk, listen and respond.

Writing

Letters and transactional tasks (units 5 and 9)

- Remember that when you write letters, invitations, messages and notes, it is essential to write in the correct style. When you write to a friend, use contractions and informal expressions. When you write a formal or semi-formal letter, invitation, message or note, do not use contractions or informal language. Use words that are typical of a more formal register. If your letter is grammatically correct but not in the correct style, you lose marks.
- Transactional writing tasks are ones where the instructions tell you who you are writing to and what information to include. When a question asks you to put specific information in your text, you lose marks if you do not include the information.
- Sometimes the information you need to include is indicated in the form of notes written on the letter or email. Remember to expand the notes and give extra information. For example, if the note is 'Say when you can come', do not just say 'I can come in the summer.' Explain why the summer is the best/only option.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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Speaking

Discussions

In speaking exams, you sometimes have to talk to one or more students about a topic. You must be ready to express and justify your opinions, especially if somebody disagrees with you.

- Make sure you understand the topic that you are to discuss. If you aren't sure, ask for clarification before you begin.
- Make sure you listen carefully to what other people say. In a discussion we speak, but we also listen and react to what others say. You can agree, disagree, make suggestions or ask questions.
- If you are working with other students, be sensitive. Don't talk for too long without giving others a chance to speak.
- In some discussions, you must come to an agreement, but in others it is not necessary. Make sure you know before you begin.
- Remember that there are not usually any right or wrong answers. The important thing is to have an opinion, to explain it clearly, to justify it and to give examples to support it.

Writing

Articles

- It can be a good idea for articles to have a title which grabs the reader's interest.
- Include expressions which speak directly to the reader in order to engage them and maintain their interest.
- Use a wide range of vocabulary in articles so that the reader gets a clear sense of what we are saying to him/her. This means going beyond vague or basic vocabulary (e.g. write *picturesque views* rather than *nice views*, *comprehensive facilities* rather than *good facilities*, etc.). Use synonyms to avoid repeating words in the article.
- Make sure you include all the information in your article that the magazine or newspaper asks for.
- The style in a article should usually be conversational and more or less informal so that you can connect with the reader. You can also include direct questions to communicate with the reader.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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Speaking

Negotiating and collaborating (units 7 and 9)

In speaking exams, there are sometimes collaborative tasks where you must work with one or more other speakers. You may be given a series of pictures or situations which you have to talk about and compare. You may have to rank them and choose the best/most suitable/most enjoyable option.

- Make sure you understand the topic that you are to discuss, and the concrete task(s). If you aren't sure, ask for clarification before you begin. Your mark will be calculated according to how successfully you complete all the tasks, or parts of the task.
- Make sure you listen carefully to what your partner or partners say. In a discussion we speak, but we also listen and react to what others say. You can agree, disagree, make suggestions or ask questions.
- If you are working with other students, be sensitive. Don't talk for too long without giving your partner a chance to speak.
- In some situations, you must come to an agreement or decision, but in others it is not necessary. Make sure you know before you begin. If you do have to come to an agreement or decision, don't do this until you have discussed most of the different options. If you can't come to an agreement, try to end in polite disagreement.
- Remember that there are not usually any right or wrong answers. The important thing is to have an opinion, to explain it clearly, to justify it (especially if somebody disagrees with it) and to give examples to support it.

Writing

Reports

- Reports should have a title.
- Separate reports into sections and give each one a suitable heading.
- It is a good idea to outline what the report is about in the introduction. At the end of the report you should be ready to make recommendations or suggestions if they ask you to.
- Make sure you include all the different points of information that they ask for.
- The style in a report should usually be formal since you usually write a report for an organisation or people that you do not know personally. If you are writing for a group of your peers, it can be less formal but should still be informative.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

Writing

For-and-against essays and opinion essays

- Remember that in for-and-against essays you must present both sides of the argument whereas in opinion essays you can just give your own side of the argument.
- In for-and-against essays and opinion essays, you should have a number of relevant points to make. Think about how to organise these points in a logical way.
- The style in for-and-against and opinion essays should be formal.
- Remember to justify the arguments you present in both types of essay.
- Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. The examiner wants to see that you can write and express yourself clearly and effectively.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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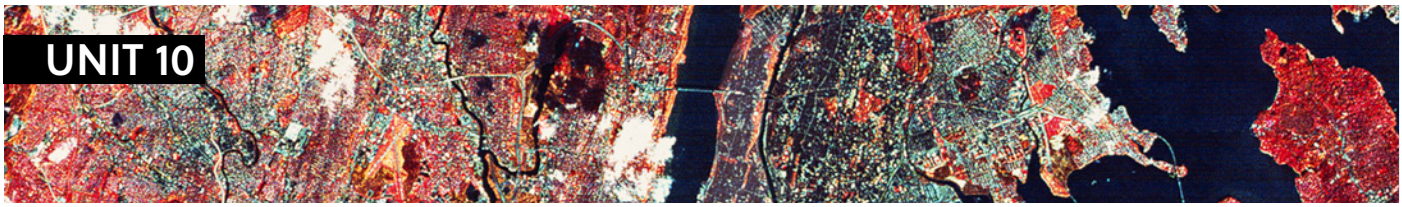
Listening

Short-answer questions

In this type of activity you have to answer comprehension questions, but there is usually a limit to the number of words that you can write.

- Always read the questions before you listen. They can give you clues about what is going to come and can help you to predict possible answers.
- The words that you write will actually appear in the text. It is not necessary to change them at all.
- Make sure that you do not write more than the number of words they tell you in the instructions or you will lose marks.
- Be careful with spelling.
- Don't worry if you don't understand everything the first time you listen. Usually you listen twice. Use the second listening to find the answers you didn't hear the first time and to check the answers you already have.



Reading

Completing tables, summaries or sentences

In this type of activity you complete a table, summary or sentences with information from a text. There is often a limit to the number of words that you can use in each space, and sometimes the words have to be taken straight from the text, in the same form. Sometimes you have a list of words which you must choose from.

Step 1: Read the text quickly to get a general understanding.

Step 2: Read the table, summary or sentences that you need to complete. Be aware that the summary or sentences will probably not use exactly the same words as in the text.

Step 3: Find the parts of the text where you think the information comes. Read them again in more detail. Remember that you will probably need to find the exact words that have to complete the gaps. When you have a list of words to choose from, these will probably not be exactly the same as the words used in the text.

Step 4: Try the words in the space and see if they make sense and follow the original meaning of the text. Make sure they fit grammatically, too. Check that you haven't repeated a word that comes just before or after the space.

Step 5: When you finish, check that you have an answer for each question. Check that you have not written too many words, or changed the form of the word if this was included in the instructions.

Writing

Proposals

- Proposals should have a title.
- Separate reports into sections and give each on a suitable heading.
- It is a good idea to outline what the proposal is about in the introduction. At the end of the proposal you should be ready to make recommendations or suggestions if required.
- Make sure you include all the different points of information that were asked for.
- The style in a proposal should usually be formal since you usually write a report for an organisation or people that you do not know personally. If you are writing for a group of your peers it can be less formal but should still be informative.
- For more information, see the Writing checklist on page 141.

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