

ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. GENERAL ADVICE

a. READ the title of the essay carefully and make sure that you understand it. If necessary, underline key words in the title. REMEMBER: if your essay does not cover the topic(s) proposed in the title, your mark will be very low.

b. WRITE AN ESSAY PLAN. You can do this in English or in your mother tongue – but remember that you must be sure that you can express your ideas easily in English. In your essay plan you should note down specific vocabulary related to the topic. You should also write down any appropriate CONNECTORS (linkers). At first, you will find writing an essay plan difficult and time-consuming, but with practice it will save you time in the end and will also help you to organise your ideas in coherent paragraphs.

EXAMPLE OF AN ESSAY PLAN:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones?

1. INTRODUCTION:

- Now everybody has a mobile.
- What happened in the past?
- There are pros and cons.

2. PARAGRAPH 1: Advantages

- Immediate contact with family and friends.
- Good in emergencies.
- Many news uses – technology is developing.

3. PARAGRAPH 2: Disadvantages

- Bad for our health; addictive.
- Not sociable?
- What happens in schools?

4. CONCLUSION:

- Good and bad aspects.
- My opinion.

KEY WORDS: technology, technological, developments, to keep in touch with someone, text messages, (on) the Internet, health, healthy, unhealthy, good//bad manners, to be banned.

POSSIBLE LINKERS: Contrast – however, nevertheless, on the one hand.....on the other hand, although, despite//Adding Information – also, in addition, moreover, furthermore//Giving your opinion – as far as I am concerned, in my view, etc.

c. PRESENTATION. Your essay should be presented neatly and should be easy to read. It is always a good idea to write an initial draft and then a clean version. The following instructions are important:

- Use blank A-4 paper. DO NOT use lined paper.
- Write your full NAME at the top right-hand corner of the page.
- Write the TITLE of the composition (exactly as it is written in the exam).
- Leave a wide MARGIN on the left.
- Leave SPACE between each line.
- Clearly indicate the beginning of each paragraph by INDENTING the first line (DO NOT use lines or dots).
- If you make a mistake, cross it out neatly with one line: ~~mistake~~.

d. REVISE your text when you have finished your first draft. This is extremely important as you will always find common mistakes and words or expressions that you are unsure of.

COMMON MISTAKES. You should make sure you are familiar with the following points of grammar and check you have used them correctly in your essays:

- Adjectives - position/number
- Gerunds and infinitives
- Much/many/a lot of
- Word order
- Another/other/others
- Prepositions
- Use of the definite article
- Agreement of subject and verb
- Correct use of verb tenses
- Punctuation
- Spelling
- False friends

**See below (section 3) for a list of some common mistakes.

e. FINALLY, remember these GENERAL RULES:

- Avoid very long, complicated sentences (with these, it is easier to make mistakes), or sentences which are too short.
- DO NOT TRANSLATE from Spanish into English. If you do this, you will inevitably make mistakes. It is better to think how you can express your ideas in a clear, simple way in English, using vocabulary and grammatical forms that you are sure of.
- Try and incorporate grammar which you have studied in Bachillerato into your essays, for example, the passive voice, relative pronouns, indirect speech, etc.
- Make sure that you use appropriate connectors so that your text appears to be more coherent.
- The best way to write well in English is to have read a wide variety of texts in English, which will both improve your level of comprehension and help you to form opinions and have ideas about which you can write. There are many websites to help improve your reading comprehension, for example:

<http://www.saberingles.com.ar/reading/index.html>

<http://www.betterenglish.org.ph/Reading/Reading.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/inthenews/newstome/archive_newstome.shtml

2. TYPES OF ESSAY

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. Description of people. | b. Description of place. | c. For and against essay. |
| d. Making a summary. | e. Narrative of a past event. | f. A biography. |
| g. Opinion essay. | h. Book or film review. | i. Formal and informal letters. |

a. DESCRIPTION OF PEOPLE

ESSAY PLAN	
1. INTRODUCTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Who is he/she? – A friend, a member of the family, a celebrity, etc.If you know him/her, how? When did you meet? How long have you known him/her?
2. PARAGRAPH 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Physical description.What does he/she usually wear?
3. PARAGRAPH 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">His/her personality.His/her job.His/her hobbies.
4. CONCLUSION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your opinion of this person.Do you get on with him/her? Why?Sum up.
Include some of the following:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Modifiers - very/really/extremely/quite/fairly/rather/a little/a bit/slightly, etc.The present simple and adverbs of frequency.Comparatives and superlatives.USEFUL EXPRESSIONS: I have known him/her for a long time/since I was a child. //We met at a party.//I first met him/her.....//To get on (well) with somebody.//To look – She often <u>looks</u> tired because she works a lot; to seem – At first, he <u>seems</u> a very serious person, but really he is great fun; to look like – He <u>looks like</u> his mother: they have both got blue eyes and black hair.	

EXAMPLE:

Write a description of a friend

I met Jack a few years ago when we both studied at our local High School. We were twelve years old and it was the first day at the new school. Jack sat next to me and at first I thought he was a bit of a nerd.

He was really tall and was the thinnest boy in the class. His hair, which was extremely long, black and greasy, covered his eyes, so that he looked like a big Saint Bernard dog. In addition, he wore dirty, torn jeans and an old T-shirt which hadn't been washed for a long time.

However, appearances are not everything. In fact, Jack is a beautiful person who is always ready to help other people. He is very reliable and in the evenings he works for a charitable organisation which looks after homeless people. We usually meet at weekends to play football in a team. Although we don't see each other very often, we get on really well.

In conclusion, I have known Jack for many years and he is now a very close friend. I'm so glad that we met all those years ago at school.

Exercise 1: Read the essay again and answer these questions.

1. Give examples of "modifiers" in the text.
2. Give examples of adverbs of frequency.
3. Find an example of the superlative.
4. Can you give examples of relative clauses?
5. What do these LINKERS mean?

So that= In addition, = However, =

Although= In conclusion,=

6. Specific vocabulary. What do the following words mean?

A nerd= greasy= to look like= torn=

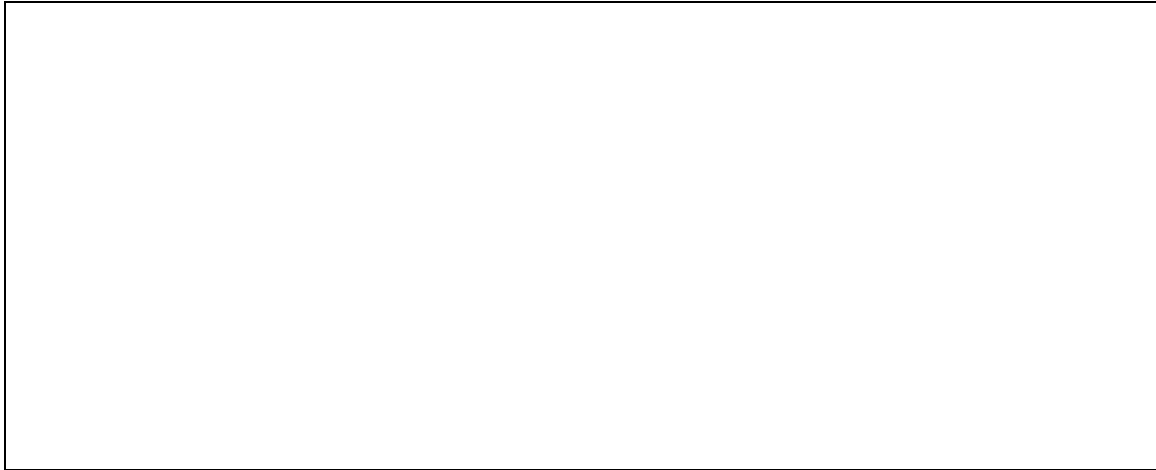
To be ready (to) = reliable= a charitable organisation=

Homeless people= to get on well= to be glad=

Exercise 2: Writing paragraphs

- Arrange the sentences about Elvis Presley into idea groups.
- Write a paragraph about Elvis Presley using the idea groups to create concise sentences.

Elvis Presley was an American.
He was a singer and actor
He was famous for rock-and-roll.
He was born in Tupelo, Mississippi.
He was born on January 8, 1935
He started singing in church.
He taught himself to play the guitar.
He first became popular on the local touring circuit for country-and-western music.
He sang romantic songs.
He danced erotically.
Teens loved him for his new style.
He had many hits.
He sang "Love Me Tender", "All Shook Up", and "Don't Be Cruel".
He died on August 16, 1977.
He died in Memphis, Tennessee.
He might have died of drug and alcohol abuse.



Exercise 3: Find the MISTAKES in the following short biography.

Jack Friedhamm was born to New York in October 25, 1965. He began school at the age of six and continued until he was 18 years. He then went to New York University to learn Medicine. He decided study medicine because he liked biology when he was at school. While he was to University he met his wife Cindy. Cindy was a beautiful woman with hair long black. They went along for years before they decided getting married. Jack began to work like a doctor as soon as he graduated to Medical School. They had two children named Jackie and Peter, and have lived in Queens since the past two years. Jack is very interested painting and likes to paint portraits of his sun Peter.



Compare your corrected version with the following:

Jack Friedhamm was born in New York on October 25, 1965. He began school at the age of six and continued until he was 18 years old. He then went to New York University to learn Medicine. He decided to study medicine because he liked biology when he was at school. While he was at University, he met his wife Cindy. Cindy was a beautiful woman with long black hair. They went out for years before they decided to get married. Jack began to work as a doctor as soon as he had graduated from Medical School. They have had two children named Jackie and Peter, and have lived in Queens for the past two years. Jack is very interested in painting and likes to paint portraits of his son Peter.

Exercise 4: Creative Writing

- Choose a famous person.
- Write down a number of important facts about that person.
- Arrange the sentences into idea groups.
- Write a paragraph using the idea groups to create concise sentences.

b. DESCRIPTION OF PLACE

ESSAY PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: Describe why you know this place. How long have you known it? Where is it?

2. PARAGRAPH 1: More detail of the town or building.

3. PARAGRAPH 2: The atmosphere of the place – why do you like it – or not?

4. CONCLUSION: Brief summary/your opinion.

Include some of the following:

- Size: tiny/small/ medium-sized/big/large/huge/enormous
- Shape: rectangular/square/round/circular/oval
- Lighting: dark/shaded/well-lit
- Location: on the right/on the left/on the top (of)/at the top (of)/on the bottom (of) /at the front (of)/behind/near/close to/under/below/over/above/on/in/at
- What can you see/hear/smell?
- What are your feelings about this place?
- Modifiers

EXAMPLE:

Describe your favourite place.

I first went to Llandudno when I was a child on holiday with my parents. Llandudno is a small seaside resort in North Wales, where many British families spent the summer. Every August we packed our suitcases and caught the train for the two hour journey to the coast.

When we arrived we immediately went to the bed and breakfast where we usually stayed. It was a typical Victorian house, built of red brick with a big window at the front which looked onto a garden filled with beautiful flowers. We had two well-lit rooms at the top of the stairs with a wonderful view of the wide sandy beach and the grey sea in the distance.

As soon as we had unpacked I would run down to the promenade and onto the beach. I remember the hours of fun I had with new friends playing football and cricket or even swimming in the sea, which was usually rather cold. It often rained, so I used to go to the pier or stay in the house exploring the enormous attic. I always had a really good time at Llandudno.

I went back to Llandudno last year and it had changed a lot. There were few people, the houses seemed poor and the pier in ruins. Nevertheless, I still have good memories of my childhood holidays in this old Welsh seaside resort.

Exercise 1: Read the essay again and answer these questions.

1. Specific vocabulary. Find the meaning of these words:

Seaside resort=

to pack=

suitcase=

Journey=

to stay=

bed and breakfast=

Red brick=

sandy beach=

promenade=

Pier=

to have a good time=

2. Can you find the LINKERS used in the text?

3. Can you find the MODIFIERS used in the text?

4. What is the author's opinion of this place?

Exercise 2: Writing paragraphs

- Arrange the sentences about New York into idea groups.
- Write a paragraph about New York using the idea groups to create concise sentences.

New York City is in the United States.

New York City is located in New York State.

It borders on the Atlantic Ocean.

It was founded in 1625 as "New Amsterdam".

It was first settled by the Dutch.

It is important for commerce.

Wall Street is located in New York City.

It has many national and international banks.

It has many important skyscrapers.

The Empire State Building is in New York City.

New York City is an important city for immigration.

Ellis Island used to be the entry point for many immigrants at the turn of the century.

There is an interesting immigration museum on Ellis Island.

Possible answer:

New York is located on the Atlantic Coast of the United States of America. It was first settled as "New Amsterdam" in 1625 by the Dutch. Today, New York City is an important commercial and banking centre which includes Wall Street. Among its many important skyscrapers is The Empire State Building. One of the most interesting museums is on Ellis Island which served as the entry point for many immigrants who passed through New York City at the turn of the century.

Exercise 3: More "idea groups"

Look at the information about Liverpool and classify it into the correct "idea group":

Good sense of humour/exciting/north-west of England/football stadium/quite large/very friendly/go shopping/buses/visit museums/wet/the pub where the Beatles first played/chilly/on the coast/warm clothes/underground trains/umbrella

What the place is like	----- -----
The people	----- -----
Things to do	----- -----
The weather	----- -----
Location	----- -----

Transport	<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>
Places to see	<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>
Things to bring	<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>

Complete the description of Liverpool with the above information:

Liverpool

Liverpool is a city which is on..... in the..... of England. It is with about 450,000 inhabitants.

The people in Liverpool are usually..... and have a Liverpool is an extremely..... city. There is a lot to see and do. You can in the day and enjoy the lively night life later. If you prefer sightseeing, you can..... or art galleries, and you can even go to..... and the houses where they grew up. If you are interested in football, you can visit the famous..... at Anfield – the home of Liverpool F.C.

Transport in the city is pretty good. There are lots of..... and they even have..... If you are planning to visit in spring, the weather can be a bit..... (around 9°C), so bring plenty of..... And don't forget an..... either because it can be rather.....!

Exercise 4: Creative Writing

- Choose a place that you know very well.
- Write down a number of important facts about that place.
- Arrange the sentences into idea groups.
- Write a paragraph using the idea groups to create concise sentences.

c. FOR AND AGAINST ESSAYS

ESSAY PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: Talk in general about the theme/Try to attract the reader's attention – for example, mention an interesting fact.
2. PARAGRAPH 1: Two or three reasons "for" – give examples where necessary.
3. PARAGRAPH 2: Two or three reasons "against" – give examples where necessary.
4. CONCLUSION: Sum up the theme/Perhaps give personal opinion/Refer back to the introduction.

Include some of the following:

- Linkers – On the one hand..... On the other hand,/In contrast,/Moreover,/Furthermore,/First,/Secondly,/Finally,/In conclusion,/To sum up,/In short,/
- The passive voice
- Relative clauses
- Conditional sentences

EXAMPLE: **Professional footballers earn too much money. Discuss.**

Nowadays in most countries in Europe professional footballers are paid a huge amount of money. International football has become a big business, so a player can often earn more in one week than an ordinary person in a whole year. Many people ask how this can be justified, especially in times of economic crisis.

On the one hand, we must remember that footballers give a lot of pleasure to a large number of people. For example, in Spain when the national team wins a match, everybody celebrates and feels extremely proud. In addition, if a team wins, a lot of money is generated and the country is given a great deal of international prestige. Therefore, many people think that paying football players a high salary is worth it.

On the other hand, despite the pleasure that footballers give to their supporters, it is difficult to accept that a select group of young men who play a game can earn so much money. In fact, some professional players have a really expensive lifestyle, owning expensive sports cars and going out with celebrities. People often wonder whether this is the example we want our children to follow.

In conclusion, while football is a very glamorous game and players sometimes earn too much money, it is also true that it is an important national game which creates a lot of money and prestige for the whole country.

Exercise 1: Read the essay again and answer these questions.

1. Find in the text the following:

a. Examples of the passive voice.

b. Examples of relative clauses.

c. A conditional sentence.

d. Linkers expressing “contrast”.

e. Examples of modifiers.

d. Examples of “specific vocabulary”.

3. SOME COMMON MISTAKES

When you have finished your essay, check it to make sure that you haven't made any of these frequent mistakes. This list is not exhaustive, so when the teacher has corrected your text, add any mistakes you have made to this list.

TYPES OF ERROR	INCORRECT	CORRECT
Adjectives	A car fast Some fasts cars	A <u>fast</u> car Some <u>fast</u> cars
As/like	He worked like a waiter in the summer.	He worked <u>as</u> a waiter in the summer.
-ing/infinitive	Write in a foreign language is difficult. He is interested in learn English.	<u>Writing</u> in a foreign language is difficult. He is interested in <u>learning</u> English.
Much/many/a lot of	They have very friends.	They have <u>a lot of</u> friends.
Word order	She speaks very well English.	She speaks English <u>very well</u> .
Another/other/others	He bought other computer.	He bought <u>another</u> computer

Adjectives ending in –ed/-ing	I was boring.	I was <u>bored</u> .
Direct questions	Did they liked the film?	Did they <u>like</u> the film?
Indirect questions	He asked me where I did work.	He asked me where I <u>worked</u> .
Present perfect	I know her for two years.	<u>I have known</u> her for two years.
Prepositions	She got married with a rich man. He spends a lot of money in clothes.	She got married <u>to</u> a rich man. He spends a lot of money <u>on</u> clothes.
Singular/plural	People is very kind. Everybody speak English in Germany.	People <u>are</u> very kind. Everybody <u>speaks</u> English in Germany.
The	I like the cats. She works the Saturdays. They go to the bed early. She goes to the church every Sunday.	I like cats. She works <u>on</u> Saturdays. They go to bed early. She goes to church every Sunday.
Than/that	Women live longer that men.	Women live longer <u>than</u> men.
To be	She has 25 years old.	She <u>is</u> 25 years old.

	I have very lucky	I <u>am</u> very lucky.
Translation	I am agree with you. I think that yes.	I agree with you. I think so.