

W.1 · Preliminary writing: responsive email

A2 Key and B1 Preliminary (KET, PET) · Cambridge English · B1 Preliminary (PET)

What this topic covers

B1 Preliminary Writing Part 1: a **responsive email** – about **100 words**, replying to a friend's email. The friend's email contains **four cues**, marked or unmarked: two questions, plus things to react to – an invitation, news, an apology, a suggestion.

- The marks: **content** (all four cues answered), **communicative** tone (friendly, natural), **organisation** (paragraphs, greeting, closing), and **language** (correct and varied).
- Memory hook: the incoming email is a **baton** with **four ribbons** on it. Your reply must touch every ribbon.
- 45 minutes for two writing parts; give the email about 20.

The anatomy of the reply

A reply has four parts, and the anatomy never changes:

1. **Greeting:** *Hi Sam, / Dear Mia,*
2. **React first:** *Thanks for your email! Great news about the competition!* – react before answering; it's what makes it a reply, not a form.
3. **Answer each cue**, one short paragraph or two sentences each, in the email's order.
4. **Close:** *Write soon. / See you Friday! / Best,* + your name.

Model (cue: invited to a weekend trip; asked what to bring, when to leave, and about the weather):

Hi Alex, Thanks for the invite – I'd love to come! A weekend at the lake sounds brilliant. You asked what to bring: I'll pack my sleeping bag and some snacks for the journey, because the village shop is always closed. Tell me if we need anything else. Leaving at eight on Saturday is fine with me; I'm an early bird anyway, so I'll meet you at the station ten minutes before. And don't worry about the rain! Last time it rained we just played cards in the tent, and it was the best part of the trip. See you soon, Lin

Four ribbons touched, 101 words, warm tone. Read it and find the four cues: the reaction, the bringing, the leaving time, the rain.

The reaction bank

Cue type	The response
news	Great news! / That's amazing! / I'm so happy for you.
invitation	I'd love to come. / Thanks for inviting me.
apology	Don't worry about it. / No problem at all.
suggestion	Good idea! / How about we also...?
question	Answer it directly, then add a detail.

- △ The reaction sentence is the cheapest mark on the paper. Students who skip it write a correct, cold robot email. Robots score lower.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Answer all four cues.** The mark scheme counts them. A beautiful email answering three cues loses to a plain one answering four.
- △ **Tone: warm and personal.** *I am writing to inform you* × – that's a business letter. *Thanks for your email!* ✓. The register is friendship.
- △ **Chinese letter habits don't travel:** no 「 」-style fixed closing wishes. *Write soon / See you / Best* is the whole wardrobe.
- △ **Don't copy the question sentences into your answer.** *"You asked what I will bring."* × – just bring it: *I'll bring...* Reported speech is for B1 grammar, not for B1 emails.
- △ **Leave two minutes to check:** articles, third-person -s, past-tense verbs. The same three classics as A2, worth the same marks.

Try it

Your friend Ana: *"I can't come to your party on Saturday – I'm so sorry! Something came up. Can we meet next weekend instead? Which day is better for you? And tell me how the party goes!"*

Cues: the apology, the new plan, the day question, the party news. Write ~100 words.

Model (98 words): *Hi Ana, Don't worry at all – we'll miss you, but these things happen! Next weekend works well for me. How about Sunday afternoon? I could come to your place at about three o'clock, and we can finally watch that film you told me about. Saturday is harder for me, because I have football practice until six. Don't be sad about missing the party: I'm planning some really silly games, and my mum is baking a huge chocolate cake. I'll take lots of photos and tell you all the gossip when I see you on Sunday. Write soon! Bo*

Find the four cues in the model: the apology (line 1), the new plan (*Next weekend works*), the day question (*Sunday afternoon*, with a reason *Saturday is hard*), the party news (*games, cake, photos*).

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How many cues? – **Four**. Touch every ribbon.
2. First sentence of the reply – **a reaction**: *Great news!* / *Don't worry at all*. Replies react; forms don't.
3. *I am writing to inform you...* – $\times \rightarrow$ **Thanks for your email!** Friendship register.
4. *"You asked which day is better."* – $\times \rightarrow$ **Sunday is better for me**. Answer, don't report.
5. Length – **about 100 words**. Twenty minutes, then Part 2.