

Objective Writing for First Certificate

100 tips for Spanish speakers

informed by the Cambridge Learner Corpus


In this booklet you will find 100 suggestions for improving your performance on the First Certificate Exam (FCE) Writing Paper 2. The exercises and advice have been informed by a study of Spanish speakers' FCE data in the *Cambridge Learner Corpus*, currently a 30 million word electronic collection of Cambridge ESOL examination scripts. This corpus has provided all the examples of Spanish-speaking candidates' errors that are used here, together with the sample answers, which have been written by Spanish-speaking FCE candidates over the last ten years.

All the sample answers are examples of good performance at FCE and can be referred to as models to aim at. Of course, most writing at this level (B2) will contain some mistakes. However, the way in which FCE Paper 2 is marked gives credit for ambitious writing, even when it contains mistakes. For this reason, you should try to use a range of vocabulary and structures in your writing. This material shows you how to develop your writing to achieve this, along with the *Objective First Certificate Student's Book* and *Workbook*.

There are two parts to the FCE Writing Paper 2. In Part 1, you will have to answer a compulsory question based on information provided in the question paper, whereas in Part 2 there is a choice of four questions, each a different task type (an article, story, report, etc). The main emphasis in Part 1 is on the inclusion of content points, effective organisation, suitably formal or informal register and accuracy. You must use your own words rather than copying phrases from the question, but don't worry if you don't feel able to use your full range of language as you can do this in Part 2. In Part 2, the main emphasis will be on language range and you should show ambition! Therefore, it is important to choose the Part 2 question that gives you the best chance to include good vocabulary and structures – choose a topic that you are familiar with and a task type that you know you can do well. Never answer a question on a set book (Question 5) unless you have been studying the book.

For up-to-date information about the format and content of the FCE Writing Paper 2, read page six of the *Objective First Certificate Student's Book*, or visit the CambridgeESOL website: www.cambridgeesol.org.

Because this booklet has been written specifically for Spanish speakers, you will find many examples of common mistakes that have been made by Spanish-speaking learners when taking FCE.

Look for this symbol – 

that indicates a common mistake and focus on the correct form: the mistake is always crossed out.

You can use this booklet in different ways:

- go through the tips in order on your own, setting yourself a certain number to look at each week. For example, if you are going to take the First Certificate exam in six months' time, cover four tips every week.
- browse the material when you have time, focusing on the areas of writing that you know you have difficulty with.
- work on the booklet with your teacher. Remember, the more preparation for writing you can do in class, the better writer you will become.

Don't just complete the exercises, think about what each tip is telling you and try to use that information in your writing.

Good luck with your writing for First Certificate!

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL CORPUS

The Cambridge International Corpus (CIC) is a collection of over 1 billion words of real spoken and written English. The texts are stored in a database that can be searched to see how English is used. The CIC also includes the Cambridge Learner Corpus, a unique collection of over 90,000 exam papers from Cambridge ESOL. It shows real mistakes students make and highlights the parts of English which cause problems for students.

www.cambridge.org/corpus

REAL ENGLISH GUARANTEE

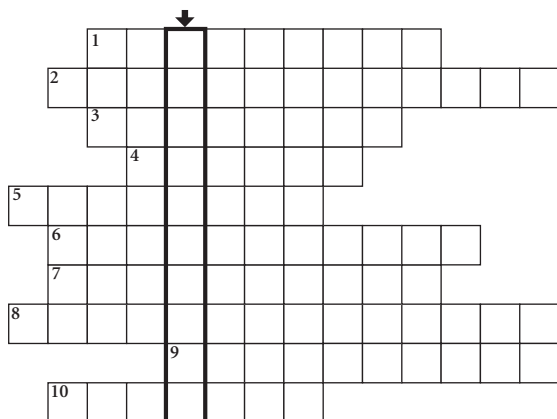


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1

Check your spelling of nouns.

Here are some common spelling mistakes that Spanish-speaking learners have made at FCE. Use a dictionary to write the correctly spelled nouns in the grid and reveal another commonly mis-spelled word.



- | | | | |
|---|---------------|----|----------------|
| 1 | situation | 6 | oportunity |
| 2 | advertisement | 7 | volleyball |
| 3 | ocassion | 8 | responsability |
| 4 | choise | 9 | goverment |
| 5 | bussiness | 10 | bicycle |

2

Write longer sentences by joining ideas together.

Choose the best joining word for these sentences written by past Spanish-speaking FCE candidates. Use each word once only (one word is not needed).

if because but or when whether

- Must I take cash can I use credit cards?
- I would like to apologise I broke a beautiful vase that was on your TV.
- I had the most spectacular birthday I was 18.
- Another thing I would like to know is the rooms have showers or not.
- All the lights were on I couldn't see anyone.

3

Practise and improve your writing by using a range of different tenses.

Read this excellent Part 2 story written by a Spanish-speaking FCE candidate, together with the examiner's comments. Underline examples of the past simple tense. Then circle the other tenses used in the story and name them.

I will never forget the day the electricity stopped. That day I was planning to give a party to celebrate my 15th birthday. For that reason my refrigerator was full of all kind of sandwiches and desserts, and many bottles of cool beverages. At first, I thought that the electricity would return in a couple of minutes, as it usually did, but, as the hours went by, I started to feel quite anxious and felt my sweat running down my back. I should not only blame my nerves for my sweat, but also the fact that it was the hottest day of that summer and, as I learnt later, even of the decade! Of course, I had to cancel the party I had been planning for almost a year. You know, friends don't appreciate food poisoning and being invited to an oven (which was what my house had become since the air conditioner wasn't working). I remember having cried for almost a week. Eventually, I got over it, but I must say that, as long as I live, I will never forget that day.

Examiner's comments

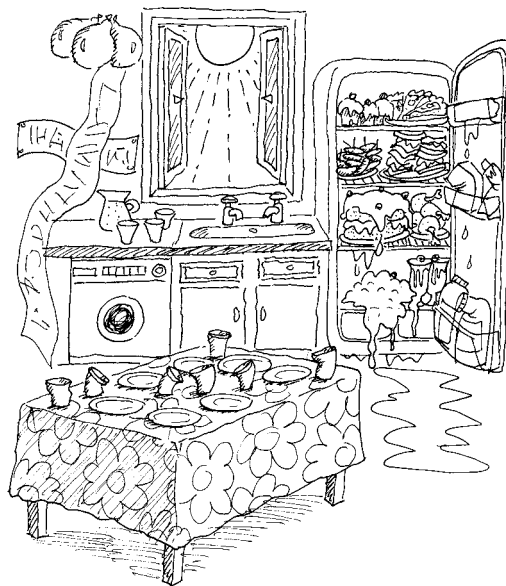
- An effective and well-written story, because of:
- ✓ an accurate range of past tenses.
 - ✓ well-controlled complex sentences.
 - ✓ effective use of linking phrases such as 'for that reason' and 'Eventually'.
 - ✓ a wide variety of vocabulary.
 - ✓ natural use of the phrasal verb 'get over'.
 - ✓ skilful rounding off at the end of the story.

4

Check your spelling of past tenses of verbs.

Write the specified past tense of the verbs below and use some of your answers in tip 5.

- 1 try (past perfect simple)
- 2 feel (past continuous)
- 3 dream (past perfect continuous)
- 4 call out (past perfect passive)
- 5 sit (past continuous)
- 6 spend (present perfect simple)



5

Remember to bring your piece of writing to a definite end, for example by including a conclusion in a report or essay, or a proper ending in a story.

Write a different ending for the story in tip 3 to follow the sentence 'I remember having cried for almost a week.' Use some of the verbs from tip 4.

.....

.....

.....

6

Use a variety of adverbs in your writing to add interest.

Find fourteen adverbs in the word square below. Choose eight of them to include in the sentences (more than one answer may be possible). Look at the position of the adverbs in each sentence.

O	C	A	L	M	L	Y	K	T	A	H	W
S	T	R	A	N	G	E	L	Y	F	E	O
U	T	P	U	R	E	L	Y	N	O	A	N
D	R	R	M	X	I	O	F	G	R	V	D
D	H	O	R	R	I	B	L	Y	T	I	E
E	Q	U	I	C	K	L	Y	T	U	L	R
N	F	D	S	R	W	E	L	L	N	Y	F
L	R	L	O	E	T	O	H	F	A	N	U
Y	O	Y	R	A	O	O	T	F	T	A	L
D	E	E	P	L	Y	M	I	D	E	G	L
X	O	N	I	L	E	A	S	I	L	Y	Y
T	R	U	L	Y	S	A	D	L	Y	P	N

- 1 The Hotel Astrid closed last year but we found the Riverside Hotel and stayed there.
- 2 Then, as as they had gone out, the lights came on again.
- 3 It was raining and my brother and I had to go to the airport to pick up our parents.
- 4 I was going out with the most gorgeous guy and I was in love with him.
- 5 enough, the man was from the same village as Maria.
- 6 We have developed such an instinct for shopping that we can say that we are kings of the urban jungle.
- 7 Ed Wood, dubbed the worst film director of all time, is played by Johnny Depp.
- 8 He seemed to be physically ok but he was shocked.

7



Be careful when talking about the opening and closing times of shops, museums, etc. The opposite of *closed* (adjective) is *open* (adjective). *Opened* is the past tense of the verb *to open*.

Shops should be open 24 hours a day.

NOT: *Shops should be opened 24 hours a day.*

8

Check you have used the right preposition.

Use a dictionary to check and correct any prepositional errors in these sentences (two sentences are correct).

- 1 After the beautiful ten days I spent in the island I returned to Santiago.
.....
- 2 In fact, it was easier to me to search for the information on the internet.
.....
- 3 To sum up, I prefer going by bicycle to going by car.
.....
- 4 I am writing to you because I am interested on the advertisement I saw on a college noticeboard.
.....
- 5 At the first couple of hours everything was very exciting.
.....
- 6 I hope you are having fun in your holidays?
.....
- 7 It might be interesting for you to hear about some things that happened in this time.
.....
- 8 People around the world are more aware of environmental problems nowadays.
.....
- 9 My job was to leave leaflets on shops and restaurants.
.....
- 10 Referring about sports, I would like to choose swimming and basketball.
.....

9

Think about the endings of certain adjectives. Adjectives ending in *-al* are often confused with related words, some of which are actually nouns, for example *educational* (adjective) and *education* (noun).

Circle the correct word in these phrases.

- 1 the *historic* / *historical* city centre of Guadalajara
- 2 a *historic* / *historical* novel set in the 19th century
- 3 *classic* / *classical* ballet
- 4 a *classic* / *classical* 1970s car
- 5 *music* / *musical* instruments
- 6 *education* / *educational* benefits

10

Be careful with 'false friends' – words that are confused with similar words in Spanish.

Here are some common mistakes that past Spanish-speaking candidates have made. Replace the 'false friends' and rewrite the sentences correctly, making any other changes that are necessary.

- 1 A good book can make you feel that you are there with the characters, inside the history.
.....
- 2 Let me know if you want me to assist an interview for the job.
.....
- 3 If we worked there, we could get some important discounts on books and CDs.
.....
- 4 It was a great notice for me to learn that you are coming here for a week.
.....
- 5 The show started later than I expected and I was getting nervous because I dislike lateness.
.....
- 6 My tennis professor has gone off to Brazil without saying anything.
.....
- 7 Most museums do not have a booklet giving good explanations of the pieces exposed.
.....
- 8 In many zoos the animals are kept in small jails, which is very harmful.
.....

11

Make your writing as interesting and descriptive as you can.

Read this interesting Part 2 article written by a past Spanish-speaking candidate. Correct any mistakes in the article and then match the underlined words with either an adjective or a verb from the boxes.

MY IDEAL PET - THE GERBIL

I would like to tell you about the gerbil. A gerbil is like a hamster but it has a long tail which has not got hair. Another difference is that a hamster lives alone whereas a gerbil is a friendly creature and prefers to live with others.

I am going to tell you why I consider the gerbil an ideal pet. Firstly: they are very cleaned, you wouldn't be worried about this. Secondly: they don't eat a lot. You can give them bread, milk, and all kind of fruit and vegetables like grapes, banana, tomato. Thirdly: it is such an amusing pet. If you have a baby or a young child, they can play with the gerbil because it is not dangerous and children will enjoy it very much. Finally, the gerbil is cheaper than any other mascot.

Afterwards, I would like to give you some important advices about how to look after your gerbil.

1 If I were you I would buy a big cage in order to give the gerbil enough place to run.

2 Gerbils hate water. A famous scientist advised me that gerbil should never be cleaned with water.

I suggest you should buy "Nature" magazine, which will give you more advices about how you should take care of your gerbil.

Examiner's comments

A good article because of:

- ✓ an informative style.
- ✓ evidence of some range of vocabulary (but over use of the verb 'give').
- ✓ a variety of structures, including good use of conditional: if I were you...
- ✓ clear organisation and linking.
- ✓ fairly good control (most errors are minor).

ADJECTIVES

entertaining

perfect

.....

huge

sociable

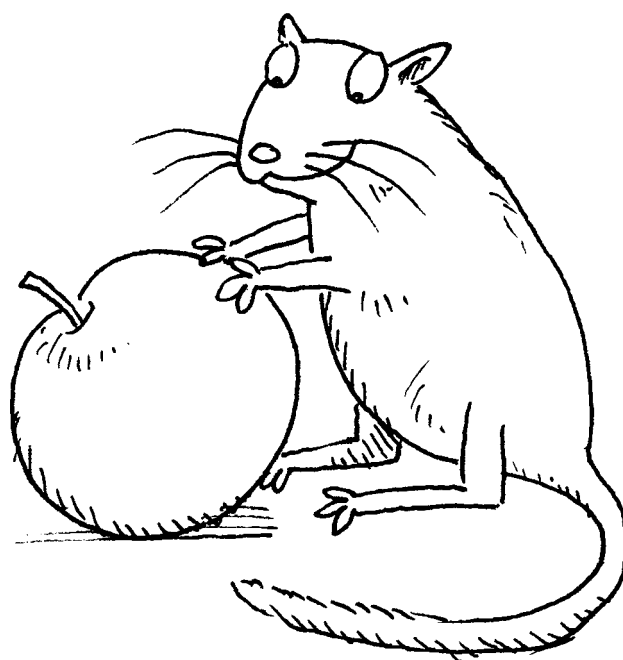
valuable

VERBS

allow

feed

offer



12

Check your use of 'quantifiers' – words such as *another, some, many* and *every*.

Replace the underlined words in these sentences with the correct word or phrase.

- I know much about first aid, so there won't be a problem if someone gets hurt.

- Finally I would like to ask you if I need a special clothes?

- Although I have some savings, I can only afford a short holiday each two years.

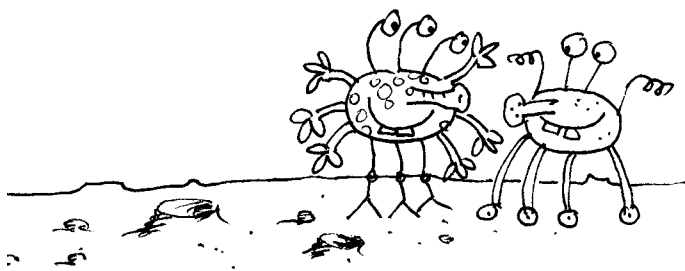
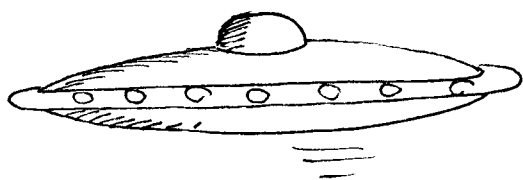
- How many money do you think I will need for those two weeks?

- Children usually spend lot of time playing video games.

- When I used the Student Tourist Guidebook any information was incorrect.

- I can cook it in only some minutes using a microwave oven.

- It was a UFO and I finally realised they were from other planet.



13

Practise letter writing and don't waste time in the exam including postal addresses in a letter, as these aren't needed.

Correct the mistakes in the letter openings below written by past Spanish-speaking FCE candidates. Which is the most formal in style? Circle A, B or C.

A

Dear Kim
 Sorry for not having written you in the last month. You know that I'm a little bit lazy, but the main reason for not writting you has been the accumulacion of exams during this month.


B

Dear Miss Helen Ryan
 I recived your letter and want to communicate my acceptance of the first prize in your competition. About accommodation, I would like a log cabin because sleeping in a tent it would be painful for me.

C

Dear Sir/Madam
 I am writing with regard to your editor's note at the back of the Student Tourist Guidebook, in which you encourage Guide users to write you some corrections and new information we can have.

14

 Be careful when spelling words with double consonants, especially where there is a similar word in Spanish – look at answer A in tip 13 above where the writer has been confused by *acumulación*.

accommodation
 NOT: ~~acomodation~~

15

Remember to use a suitable closing expression when writing a letter.

Write *F* (formal) or *I* (informal) beside these expressions.

- 1 Yours faithfully
- 2 Lots of love
- 3 Hugs and kisses
- 4 Warmest wishes
- 5 Yours sincerely

16

Check that you haven't missed out a preposition after a verb.

Decide which preposition is missing from each of these sentences and show where it should go. Which preposition is most commonly omitted?

- 1 I would like to ask you my £20 back.

- 2 It was great to hear you.

- 3 I will be waiting your answer.

- 4 When we arrived in Spain, we had to explain our parents about our adventure.

- 5 I have to thank you the letter you sent me.

- 6 I'd like to find a job in London to pay my stay there.

- 7 People can keep fit and healthy if they really want.

- 8 What do we mean when we talk being 'rich and famous'?

17

Check phrases containing the word *sports*.

Tick (✓) all the nouns below that make a phrase when put after the word *sports*.

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1 activities | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 field | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 centre | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 instructor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 competitions | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8 line | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 day | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9 star | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10 way | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Be careful not to leave off the letter 's' in certain phrases.

sports facilities
 NOT: *sport facilities*

18



Be careful to spell words with the prefix *dis-* correctly.

I disagree with the article.
 NOT: *I desagree with the article.*

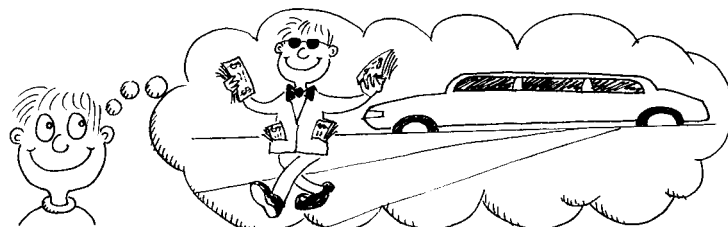
There are a lot of disadvantages.
 NOT: *There are a lot of desadvantages.*

19

Try to avoid using the word *beautiful* all the time – there are many other adjectives you can use in English.

Use a dictionary to check the meanings of the adjectives below and tick (✓) the ones that mean the same or almost the same as *beautiful*.

- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 1 attractive | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 magnificent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 delightful | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 plain | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 funny | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8 splendid | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 gorgeous | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9 stunning | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 lovely | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10 ugly | <input type="checkbox"/> |



20

Practise answering exam questions on a set book for Part 2, Question 5.

Read this answer on *Great Expectations* by a past Spanish-speaking candidate. Correct the few mistakes in spelling and word order. Then divide the answer into three paragraphs.

I have read "Great Expectations" by Charles Dickens. I like very much this author. In the novel the main character Pip tells his own story, looking back on his life. Estella is the second character in Great Expectations. The writer shows her as a beautiful girl who is being brought up by Miss Havisham because she lost her parents. Estella is a rude woman who is arrogant also. This characteristic is shown when she looks down on people who are not wearing elegant clothes. Estella shows that she has the power in the relationship with Pip, for example when she only permits that Pip kisses her. From my point of view in "Great Expectations" the last chapter was so awful. The end of the book shows that Estelle probably learns that money and social life are not the most important things. I think these topics are helpfull for someone, especially for women.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

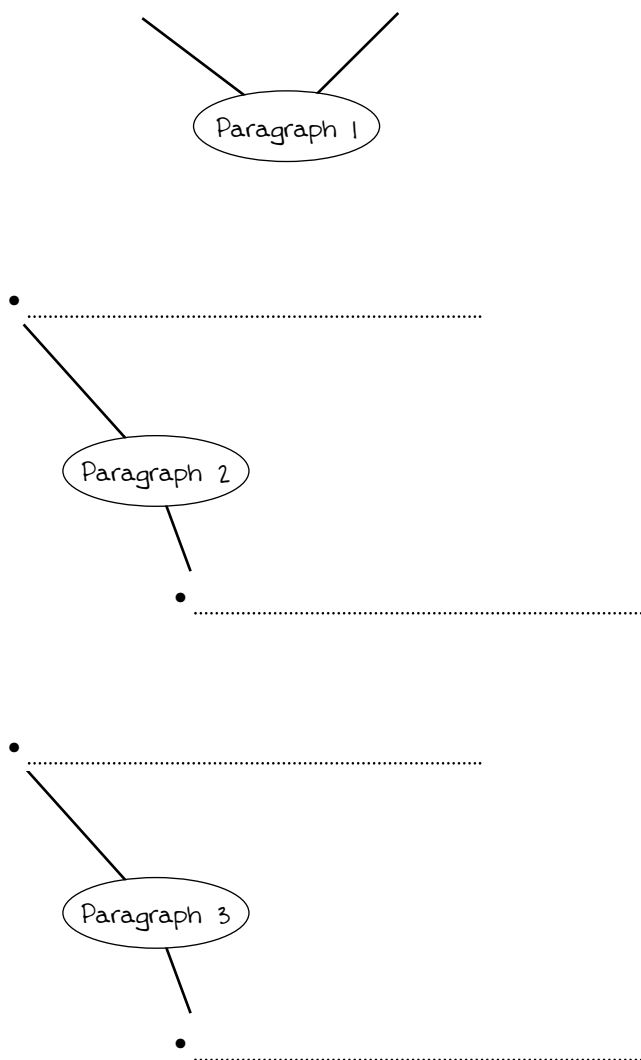
.....

21

In the exam make a paragraph plan before you start writing your answer. Then write your answer clearly and always leave a line between paragraphs.

Look at the start of a paragraph plan below for the answer in tip 20. Complete the plan for the remaining two paragraphs in the answer.

- Introduction - mention title and author
- Info about main character - Pip



22**Remember that some verbs have irregular forms.**

Make any corrections necessary to the verbs in these sentences (one sentence is correct).

- 1 The dates you have choosen are perfect.

- 2 I buyed the computer in a small shop in my town.

- 3 Maybe the money should be spended on building a new library.

- 4 When I was a child, my uncle teached me all about this area.

- 5 She accepted and I payed her a lot of money.

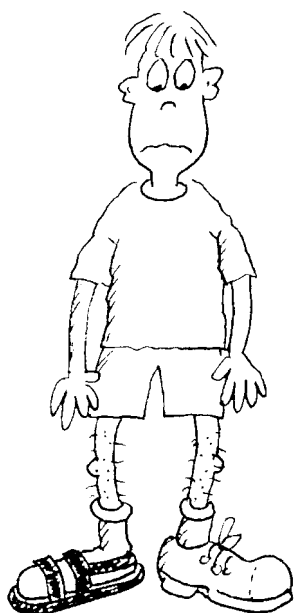
- 6 I finded a new place, where there are special rates for students.

- 7 There lied Mrs Connors, in a pool of blood.

- 8 Finally I waked up and to my surprise it was all a dream.

- 9 We didn't finish the race because Mireia felled off her bike.

- 10 I was so nervous that I put on two different shoes.

**23****Check your use of capital letters. Remember that days of the week, months, languages and nationalities always start with a capital.**

Write out these nationalities, starting with the capital letter shown.

- 1 u s g P t o e u r e
- 2 z a B i a l r i n
- 3 h r c F n e
- 4 d w h i S e s
- 5 s a n p e J a e

24**Check the tenses you use in conditional sentences.**

Correct any inaccurate tenses in these sentences (two sentences are correct).

- 1 I would also be pleased if you can tell me about the other activities.

- 2 If you get lost somebody could find you.

- 3 Unless you take a holiday you'll have a lot of problems with your health.

- 4 It would be great if you add this hotel in your next edition.

- 5 This would not end unless the city traffic department starts to control the number of vehicles.

- 6 If I'd known how good it was I would have invited you.

- 7 If I were you, I'll choose the more expensive one.

- 8 I will not remain silent about the matter unless you gave me my money back.

25



Be careful to spell words with 'silent' letters correctly.

environment *which*
 NOT: ~~enviroment~~ NOT: ~~wich~~

26

Try to be ambitious! Use a range of vocabulary – especially different adjectives.

Choose from the adjectives in the box below to complete the essay (more than one answer may be possible).

above-mentioned beautiful challenging
 convenient different modern negative
 previous practical spacious suitable

Is it better to live in a flat, a ¹ house or an old house? This is a really ² question. In my opinion, each one of the ³ possibilities has something positive about it, but also something ⁴ There are many ⁵ aspects to consider.

First of all, I have to say that I have always lived in a big old house with a ⁶ garden. So, considering my ⁷ experience, I would prefer this kind of house. Obviously, living in a flat is very ⁸ and more ⁹ if you live alone. However, if you have a family, it is better to live in a ¹⁰ house, whether it is old or new.

To sum up, the most ¹¹ thing to consider when choosing where you will live is that the place has to be the most ¹² one for your way of life.

27

Remember that some nouns are uncountable and never have an 's' on the end.

Correct any noun errors in these sentences and also make any other corrections necessary (one sentence is correct).

- 1 The place is very dirty and full of rubbish and pieces of glasses.
.....
- 2 I helped them to set up the sound equipments.
.....
- 3 It would help me to widen my knowledges of different kinds of food.
.....
- 4 You usually have to pay for the parkings.
.....
- 5 Children can do their homeworks on the computer at home.
.....
- 6 I have not received any news from you since last summer.
.....
- 7 Here are some advices, which I think will be helpful.
.....
- 8 However, there are some informations about Lampton that are incorrect.
.....

28



Don't forget to write the 's' in Yours when writing closing expressions in a letter.

Yours sincerely *Yours faithfully*
 NOT: ~~Yours~~ sincerely NOT: ~~Yours~~ faithfully