The E8 Writing Scale 2016

Scale Interpretation

Impressum

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I   Basic Information

In the rater training courses over the past years it has become clear that the E8 Writing Rating Scale as it stands is by no means self-explanatory and ready for general use. The way the descriptors are formulated leaves room for differing interpretations, which can lead to diverging assessments. Therefore, some comments on how to read and interpret the scale are added here to promote a common understanding of what all the elements in the scale mean and how they relate to each other.

Further it needs to be noted that the E8 Writing Rating Scale has been developed for the purpose of assessing performances that are the result of large-scale assessment and thus the rating process of these performances does differ from assessing written performances for teaching purposes. Nonetheless, it is important that teachers make themselves and their students familiar with these assessment criteria as they implicitly reflect the writing process. The wording used in the scale might help teachers to provide supportive feedback to their students as well as inform a process-oriented approach to teaching writing.

II   The Assessment Scale

1   General description of the assessment scale

The scale was developed for the assessment of students' performances in the Austrian national assessment of English at grade 8 (Bildungsstandardüberprüfung Englisch, 8.Schulstufe). It is based on the can-do descriptors describing the writing performances at grade eight as specified in the BIST-Verordnung.

Schreiben	Kompetenzniveau nach GERS
1. Kann Erfahrungsberichte schreiben, in denen Gefühle und Reaktionen in einem einfachen, zusammenhängenden Text wiedergegeben werden.	B1
2. Kann eine Beschreibung eines realen oder fiktiven Ereignisses, z. B. einer Reise, verfassen.	B1
3. Kann ein Geschichte erzählen.	B1
4. Kann in Form verbundener Sätze etwas über das alltägliche Umfeld schreiben, wie z. B. über Familie, andere Menschen, Orte, Schule.	A2+
5. Kann kurze, einfache Biografien und andere einfache fiktionale Texte schreiben.	A2
6. Kann ausführliche Karten, persönliche Briefe und E-Mails schreiben und darin auch über Ereignisse, Erfahrungen und Gefühle berichten.	B1
7. Kann kurze, einfache Notizen und Mitteilungen schreiben, die sich auf unmittelbare Bedürfnisse beziehen.	A2
8. Kann einfache Texte z. B. zu Bildimpulsen oder Schlüsselwörtern (key words) schreiben.	A2

Table 1: Austrian BIST-descriptors for Writing

The descriptors in the assessment scale are based on the descriptors of the CEFR. However, the applicability of a particular descriptor does not automatically signal that a script is a given CEFR level. Firstly, bands consist of more than one descriptor, and secondly, linking written performances to the CEFR is a complex procedure.

Furthermore, the test is designed to elicit language samples that allow the candidates to be assessed in four areas:

- Task Achievement
- Coherence and Cohesion
- Grammar
- Vocabulary

Task Achievement is demonstrated by an appropriate response to the task. In practical terms this means that all expected content points of the prompt should be clearly and meaningfully mentioned by the test takers. For the higher bands, elaboration of some content points is required.

The second dimension, Coherence and Cohesion, is the ability to produce fluent texts by using suitable devices to create coherence and cohesion on sentence, paragraph and text level. Marking paragraphs is mandatory in long texts for performances at band 3 and above. Ideally, a new paragraph is signalled by indenting slightly and/or leaving a blank line.

The third dimension, Grammar, assesses the range of grammatical structures and the ability to use them accurately. Finally, the fourth deals with the choice of vocabulary, vocabulary range, and its accuracy and relevance to the content.

In the following paragraphs, these four dimensions are discussed in more detail.

2   Description of the four dimensions

Task Achievement

The scale for Task Achievement has no direct correlation with the CEFR. Its purpose is to assess the content components of a text and text type requirements.

Mentioning a content point

The first issue, which seems simple enough, is to decide whether a content point has been mentioned in a script or not. Whereas this is quite straightforward in most cases there is room for confusion when, for instance, some key words from the prompt appear in the text, but the language around them does not make much sense. As "all expected content points are to be clearly and meaningfully mentioned" such a content point would not be considered as being mentioned.

Elaborating a content point

Distinguishing between the mentioning and the elaboration of a content point has been found to be, at times, challenging and confusing when assessing Task Achievement. The following example, taken from one of the scripts used in the rater training sessions, can serve to demonstrate what "mentioning a content point" means:

> *Example for mentioning a content point:*
>
> *"We live now in New York near the Central Park, we moved because my mum had not found a job." – In this sentence, the respective content points are considered mentioned. The text goes on: "But in New York my mum has a good job."*

This sentence extends the content point a little ("the reason for moving"), but as it is little more than a reformulation of the previous sentence, it cannot be seen as elaboration.

Elaboration could have been something like this:

> *Example for elaborating a content point:*
>
> *"In New York she works as a secretary in a bank on the 35th floor of a high building in Manhattan and is quite happy."*
>
> *Or: "In New York she sells pancakes in the streets, and she is happy."*

Good elaboration involves the introduction of a new idea, a real extension of what has been said before.

Less successful elaboration is difficult to define. There will probably be some additional detail or another similar idea will be introduced, but the improvement of the text, the extra information added, will be negligible.

> *Example for less successful elaboration:*
>
> Content point: *Tell him/her about the first days of your 'new life' (new school, teachers, …):*
>
> Student response: *"I have new friends but you are forever my best friend. The new school is very big. The teachers are sometimes unfriendly. And the school colleagues are not polite."*

The first sentence mentions new and old friends. Then it moves abruptly to the cues from the prompt and adds some simple words to each. Finally there is a new sentence based on the same pattern. There is some elaboration here, no doubt, but it is not very good. This will be reflected in the assessment.

Prompt related elaboration

To accommodate the occasional difficulty of extensive text in a written response that is not obviously related to a content point, test takers can be rewarded for showing *prompt related elaboration.* This can be defined as elaboration that is general though meaningful and clearly related to the task, but cannot be linked to an individual content point despite obviously adding extra information to the written response. Prompt related elaboration is classified in the same manner as content point elaboration and should be judged to be excellent/good or weak.

Judging the quality

Whereas on one level we can assess Task Achievement quantitatively by simply counting the content points mentioned and elaborated respectively, the discussion above makes it clear that in addition to this there is also a qualitative component to be considered. The first question is *How many?,* but the second is *How good?* Thus it is necessary to make judgments of quality as well as quantity with regards to the content points that have been mentioned and, possibly, elaborated.

To make this complex task a little easier, two grids have been designed listing the most likely combinations for each of the seven bands. The yellow and green options in the grids correspond directly with the Writing Assessment Scale (short tasks and long tasks respectively), while the white ones apply to all tasks.

Grid 1: Short Tasks – See appendix.

Grid 2: Long Tasks – See appendix.

Obviously, there is more room for elaboration in a long prompt response than in a short one. Therefore, raters should be aware that elaboration in a short prompt will not be as extensive as similarly graded elaboration in a long prompt.

Performances at band zero

In large-scale assessment, certain quality criteria have to be implemented to enable identification of a performance that is below the expected level or does not meet the expected standards. Listed below are the criteria for rating a text at 0 in dimensions:

- Texts that have not even been attempted, i.e. an empty page
- Texts that are illegible, mainly in German, or just drawings

- Fewer than 50 words in long texts and fewer than 20 words in short texts
- Texts that do not deal with the given topic and the content points listed
- Texts that cover fewer content points than necessary for band 1
- Texts that are extremely rude, sexist, racist, or propagating violence

Texts rated for an actual BIST performance will be assessed in a more restrictive and, possibly, more detailed manner than those assessed for classroom and general teaching purposes. Therefore, it is not expected that the criteria listed above would always be applied during the assessment of texts produced by pupils in the classroom.

Text type requirements

Text type requirements have invited frequent discussions in the rater training sessions and amongst teachers in general. The issue, however, is greatly simplified by the context of use, which is language testing at E8 level. This simply means that in this context there is little room for stylistic variation on the part of the students. In most cases an informal register is the only one they have access to, and students are not expected to introduce stylistic differences related to particular text types that is above the targeted CEFR level.

Students are required to know how to open and close a letter, a postcard, or an email. In practical terms – and in the context of E8 testing – this means that meeting text type requirements is considered a given requirement so the students do not get a bonus for it. Texts will in fact be downgraded by one band when there are problems in this area (missing/inappropriate salutation or closing formula).

Texts that are placed at band zero due to downgrading (text type requirements) are assessed in the other three dimensions.

Text length

The issue of text length has been significantly simplified. The main point is that over-length texts are not penalized whereas texts that are significantly below the requested number of words (fewer than 50 and 20 respectively) are rated zero. This is based on the assumption that a writer who delivers less than fifty per cent of the length required will have serious problems in producing a substantial text. In all other cases, e. g. 70/25 words, there is no downgrading. However, the obvious lack of scope in these texts will be reflected in the rating.

Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence is a quality criterion that refers to the logical arrangement of ideas and arguments within a text. In a well written – that is coherent – text the writer successfully arranges his/her sentences to achieve a purpose, e. g. to reflect the chronological sequence of events or to develop a convincing line of argument. In a coherent text, ideas and arguments flow smoothly and logically allowing the reader to easily follow the writer's train of thought. There should be no need for the reader to stop and reread in order to establish meaning. A less coherent text, however, impairs readability and appears jumpy.

The term cohesion refers to the relationships between elements of a text created by the linking of words, words groups and individual sentences. There are several ways in which cohesion can be established. Simple sentences can be connected by using transition words such as *"and", "but"* or *"because".*

> *Example:*
>
> *"My holiday was a disaster. It rained almost every day."* can be reformulated as *"My holiday was a disaster, because it rained almost every day."* Another solution would be linking the two sentences: *"It rained almost every day. Therefore my holiday was a disaster."*

Some such cohesive devices that we may expect writers to use at level A2/B1 are:

Addition	and, also, or
Time	when, after, before,
Result	so, therefore
Contrast	on the one hand/ on the other hand, although
Reason	because, as
Exemplification	for example
Sequence	first …. then, then, next, finally

We do, however, have to bear in mind that a text can be coherent even if very few of these cohesive devices are used, and on the other hand the frequent use of cohesive devices does not necessarily turn an incoherent text into a coherent one.

Pronouns, possessives and demonstratives

Other techniques to make a text appear cohesive include the use of personal pronouns, possessives, demonstratives and comparatives. At a very simple level, in the two sentences *"My best friend is Michael. He is in the same class as I."* cohesion is realised by using the personal pronoun *'he'* instead of repeating the name *'Michael'.* Similarly, in a passage such as *"My sister has the big room in the house. Mine is a lot smaller."* the possessive "mine" refers to the room in the previous sentence, thus linking the two sentences. Demonstratives can serve the same purpose. In *"I got a new camera for my birthday. That was my best present ever"* the word "that" refers to the camera the writer got, thereby linking the two sentences successfully.

Substitution and lexical chains

Sentences can also be connected by substituting one or more words in a sentence. In *"We have a lot of field trips in our school. The nicest one was to Schönbrunn Zoo."* the writer has replaced *"field trips"* by *"one"* in the following sentence. In *"Girls are better at English. Everybody thinks so."* the word *"so"* represents the whole idea that girls are doing better at English. A particularly successful way of establishing cohesion in a text is the use of lexical chains.

> *Example:*
>
> *"When I think of clothing I would say that T-shirts with crazy designs like dots, squares, skulls are definitely in. All my friends are wearing that and they think it's the latest craze! This year wearing the 'right' shoes like 'Converse' or 'Vans' is very important. Everybody loves to wear them because it's a must-have!"*

In the first sentence the writer uses the phrase *"definitely in"* to describe certain kinds of fashionable T-shirts. In the following sentence this idea is continued by using the phrase *"the latest craze".* At the end of the paragraph this concept of a fashion product is reformulated as *"it's a must-have".* This establishes a lexical chain that binds the sentences together and establishes a smooth flow of ideas in the paragraph.

In the CEFR, coherence and cohesion is an aspect of the pragmatic competences of a language user. The discourse competences relevant for writing that are dealt with by the CEFR are: flexibility to circumstances, thematic development, and coherence and cohesion. As the latter is the quality criterion that is of particular relevance within the limitations of A2/early B1 writers it is the one that is represented in the E8 rating scale. The E8 scale for coherence and cohesion mirrors the CEFR by moving from the very basic A1 skill of being able to link words with linear connectors such as *"and"* or *"then"* to A2, where connectors are used to successfully express reason *("because")* and contrast *("but")* in order to link words or word groups. A2+ includes the ability to use these most frequent connectors to describe

something as a *"list of points",* whereas one level further up at B1 the loosely connected list of points has become a fully connected *"linear sequence of points".*

The E8 rating scale for writing includes the aspects of both coherence and cohesion. Regarding coherence we expect a text to be essentially clear in its message and coherent at bands 5 to 7, but accept some vagueness and ambiguity in band 5. Band 3 texts are characterized by frequently incoherent text elements, which may impair clarity and readability, while band 1 texts are not coherent at all and consist of mostly disconnected chunks of language. In such band 1 texts we only find the most basic linear connectors such as *"and"* or *"then"* as cohesive devices on word group level, while band 3 texts should already show simple sentence level cohesion with a wider range of connectors. A band 3 writer is able to link sentences successfully using simple connectors, but usually fails to produce longer stretches of connected language at paragraph level, making a text appear as a choppy list of points rather than a longer connected sequence. From band 5 up we can demand this longer connected sequence of sentences, with the writer being able to link sentences into clear paragraphs. At band 5 we want to see this ability reflected in at least some parts of the text, while at band 7 the whole text should reflect good sentence as well as paragraph level cohesion, making the text flow well. At the top band 7 an expert writer will probably not only manage to link his/her sentences smoothly and logically to produce a coherent paragraph, but might also show clear relationships between paragraphs. Needless to say the degree to which the test taker can master these issues of coherence and cohesion also depends on the complexity of the ideas he/she puts forward and this may have to be taken into account for rating purposes. The more complex and unusual the ideas in a text are, the more we have to accept some instances of jumpiness in the way they are presented.

Paragraphing

In long texts recognizable paragraphs are expected from band 3 up. Failure to use paragraphs will result in downgrading of the text by one band. Ideally such paragraphs will be signalled by either indentation or a blank line. A sequence of individual sentences marked as paragraphs, however, cannot be accepted as successful paragraphing.

In short texts coherence and cohesion is generally more difficult to demonstrate. Paragraphs are not mandatory and, if used to good effect, could be considered as a reason for upgrading the text. At the top band 7 good writers may well decide to use paragraphs even in a shorter text. In the long text, in particular, the content points in the prompt will already suggest a sequence of paragraphs to the writer, but it is the decision of the test taker how he/she chooses to organize his/her text. The ability to structure a text of around 150 words in meaningful paragraphs is an important skill expected of writers in the 8th grade.

Grammar

When assessing grammar, two aspects have to be considered. Firstly, do the test takers have the necessary grammatical tools (i.e. grammatical structures) to accomplish the task, and secondly, can they apply these structures correctly? Good writers at A2/B1 level are able to make use of a range of grammatical structures that are reasonably correct to accomplish successful communication. Therefore the scale for grammar comprises descriptors both for range and control.

Grammatical range

It is worth mentioning that there is no scale for grammatical range in the CEFR and that the assessment scale's concept of grammatical range has, therefore, no direct correlation with the CEFR. But as the CEFR descriptors for "grammatical accuracy" refer to the correct use of "some simple structures" at level A2 and the reasonably accurate use of "a repertoire of frequently used routines and patterns" at level B1, we can see that range is actually addressed and the E8 approach of differentiating between range and accuracy is justified. Another good reason for this approach is the analogy to the vocabulary scale, which also differentiates between range and control.

Grammatical range refers to the variety of grammatical structures that test takers produce in their texts. The ability to show this variety is not only influenced by the test takers' grammatical knowledge, but also by the design of the tasks. That is, short prompts (designed to target A2 language) provide fewer opportunities to show grammatical range than long prompts (designed to target B1 language), as the time allocation and the expected number of words will have an impact on range. However, even if we do not expect the test takers to use structures that are not directly elicited by the task, this does not automatically suggest that the response cannot be more complex than the stimulus. Even if a task is simple in nature, variety in grammatical structures can be shown.

Writers are encouraged to demonstrate their full potential, and the more varied the structural features are, the better. However, variation should not be exaggerated either: the grammatical structures used should be authentic and natural.

The following table[1] illustrates which grammatical features have been identified as being characteristic and indicative of L2 language competence at levels A2 and B1. This overview is not meant to capture all language features a learner should use when writing a text based on a short or long task. This list should simply serve as a guide to linguistic features that could be used by test takers. The rater can then decide whether these features have been correctly used and if variation has been shown.

	Key features (in increasing complexity)	Examples of use/functions
	Basic regular and irregular verb forms	*We went to the cinema. I lived in a small village.*
	(Verb+) infinitives	*… something to eat; I want to buy a coat*
	Gerunds (-ing form) after verbs and prepositions; as subjects and objects	*I like singing. I drank a cup of coffee before leaving. Swimming is good exercise.*
	Simple passive forms	*The houses were built by a famous architect. The t-shirt is made of cotton. I was born in China.*
	Verb + object + infinitive (with or without to)	*I would like you to come. I ordered him to do it. I helped him bake the cake.*
	Causative have/get	*I'll get my hair cut next week. We had our house painted last year.*
Modals	Some modals in their basic senses (in affirmative, negative and interrogative statements)	*can (ability; requests; permission); could (ability; polite requests); would (polite requests); should (advice); may (possibility); must, have (got) to (obligation)*
Modals	Complex auxiliaries	*would rather; had better*
Modals	Additional modal uses	*will (offer); shall (suggestion; offer); might (possibility); mustn't (prohibition); need (necessity); needn't (lack of necessity); ought to (obligation)*
Modals	Used to + infinitive (past habits)	*I used to share my room with my brother.*
	Different types of adjectives/adverbs	*Mainly used for comparing and modifying*
	Regular and irregular forms of comparative and superlative forms	*Football is the most popular sport. It is smaller than my old phone and it isn't very expensive. It was so beautiful. It is quite expensive. I think it was really interesting.*
	(not) as ... as; the same (... as)	*My phone was as expensive as hers. Our house is not as big as the one of our neighbours.*
	too, enough	*The jacket is too small. My room is big enough for me.*
	(not) ... enough to; too ... to	*My English is not good enough to speak to them. He was too busy to write a letter. The machine is too old to work well.*
	Compound adjectives	*The boy was tall and good-looking. This is a well-known band.*

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1   Based on the English Grammar Profile (http://www.englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile) and the Cambridge Handbooks for the KEY exam (www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/168174-cambridge-english-key-for-schools-handbook-for-teachers-.pdf) and the PET exam (www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/168150-cambridge-english-preliminary-teachers-handbook.pdf)

Nouns	Countable, uncountable and abstract nouns	*There are a lot of flowers and trees. I like to listen to music and watch TV. Send them my love.*
	Singular and plural nouns (regular and irregular forms)	*She has black eyes, a beautiful round face and nice teeth. The floor in the kitchen has many holes and I think there are mice.*
	Compound nouns	*She likes to go to the swimming pool. There are three bedrooms but only two bathrooms. My house is next to the bus stop.*
	Simple noun phrases with determiners like articles, some, any, this, these, much, many, a lot of etc.	*My mother is a teacher. I phoned for more information two days ago. My mother told me that this food is healthy food and good for me.*
	Genitive: 's & s'	*It's my sister's jacket. I actually like wearing clothes that attract people's attention. These are my brothers' bedrooms.*
	Double genitive	*She is a friend of theirs.*
	Complex noun phrases with pre- and post-modifiers	*It is a big city with many nice people. There is even a fun fair called "Prater". There are many high buildings like the Empire State Building or the World Trade Center.*
	Present simple	*to express:* *states, habits, systems and processes;* *with verbs not usually used in the continuous form*
	Present continuous	*for current actions*
	Past simple	*for past events*
	Future with going to / will, shall	*to express offers, promises, predictions, plans, intentions*
	Present perfect simple	*to express:* *recent past with just;* *indefinite past with yet, already, never, ever;* *unfinished past with for and since*
	Past continuous	*to express:* *parallel past actions* *continuous actions interrupted by the past simple tense*
	Present simple and continuous	*future meaning*
	Past perfect simple	*narrative and in reported speech*
Sentence structure	Rather short and simple main clauses (S-P-O pattern)	*I liked your party. We live in London. My mother has got a new job. I met a lot of interesting people.*
	Direct wh-questions	*What are you going to wear? When should we meet?*
	Co-ordinate clauses	*We came back and went to bed. He is English but his mother is Spanish.*
	Subordinate clauses with or without that, following ...	
	sure, know, think, believe, hope, say ...	*I think this is an interesting place. I know (that) they don't like me. I hope you're fine. She says (that) she's his sister.*
	if, when, where, because	*I'll leave if you do that again. I'll come when you call. He'll follow where you go. I came because you asked me.*
	Relative clauses with who, which, that	*I watched it with my brother who was also interested in sports. Thanks for your letter which I received a few days ago.*
	Descriptive phrases introduced by a past participle	*There are beautiful paintings painted by famous British painters.*
	Indirect questions	*Guess where it is? I don't know what to do. Do you know what he said? I wondered what he would do next.*
	Basic conditional sentences, mainly types 0, 1, 2	*An iron bar expands if/when you heat it. If you do that again, I'll leave. I would tell you the answer if I knew it. If I were you, I wouldn't do that again.*
	Simple statements, questions and commands in reported speech, following say, ask, tell	*He said that he felt ill. I asked her if I could leave. No one told me what to do.*
	Relative clauses with whom, whose	*… this famous actor whose films I like so much.*
	-ing clauses	*I saw him taking a taxi. He was sitting there, drinking a coffee and writing something.*

Range versus accuracy

A mistakes and correction driven tradition of teaching can inhibit the use of grammatically challenging language by learners. However, the focus of E8 standards is on successful communication and on language that works. It is E8 testing policy that range is given priority over accuracy in the sense that rich grammatical range through risk taking is encouraged, while minor inaccuracies that do not impair communication are not significantly penalised. The more varied the grammatical range, the higher the band. Risk taking, which may result in rich structures but reduced control, can even be a reason for placing a text at a higher band.

Global errors, i.e. errors that interfere with the comprehensibility of the text, will cause the text to be place at a lower band. Local errors which do not hinder communication will not automatically lead to a lower band unless they occur very frequently.

The placement of a performance at a certain band therefore reflects the range of grammatical structures and the level of their correctness.

Band 7 texts feature a *good range of structures,* which create natural language within the framework of the task. The writer varies the grammatical structures elicited by the prompt and may occasionally go beyond the obvious and expected. However, any enhancement should not make the text sound unnatural or result in exaggeration of grammatical structures (range for the sake of range). In addition to good range, *a relatively high degree of grammatical control* is expected in band 7 texts. A *few inaccuracies* can occur but they will *not impair communication.*

Band 5 texts show a *sufficient range of structures.* Sufficient range is achieved if the writer makes enough use of the prompt's structural stimuli. *Occasional inaccuracies which do not impair communication* can be tolerated.

Band 3 texts feature a *limited range of simple structures.* This means that the grammatical structures used are mostly very simple, repetitive and hardly varied. There can be *some inaccuracies which can impair communication.*

Band 1 texts feature an *extremely limited range of simple structures.* Extremely limited range results in structures that hardly go beyond the learnt repertoire of beginners, for example, the repetitive use of rather short sentences with a very simple subject-predicate-object sentence pattern. In addition to structural restrictions, band 1 texts show *limited control;* there might be *frequent inaccuracies* which *sometimes even cause a breakdown of communication.*

Vocabulary

When we assess vocabulary we are looking at content words (nouns, full verbs, adjectives, adverbs), collocations and chunks of language that a writer uses to perform a written communicative task. We are assessing whether lexis is sufficiently correct to accomplish successful communication. Like the grammar scale, the scale for vocabulary also comprises descriptors for range and control.

The concept of lexical range

Range refers to the breadth of vocabulary a candidate uses in a written text. In the E8 context, range must be interpreted in relation to the prompt as raters can assess only the vocabulary elicited by the prompt. The time allocated and the expected text length have an impact on range. Short tasks are likely to provide fewer opportunities to demonstrate vocabulary range than long tasks. As mentioned, short tasks have been designed to elicit A2 responses and long tasks have been designed to elicit B1 responses. For these reasons the range of lexical items that we can expect in short tasks are words and phrases typically mastered at A2[2] level; for long tasks we can expect some words and phrases typically mastered at B1[3] level.

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2   Available at: http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/22105-ket-vocabulary-list.pdf [08 July, 2016].
3   Available at: http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/84669-pet-vocabulary-list.pdf [08 July, 2016].

Even if a task is simple in nature we may expect differentiation within the choice of words. For example, if a task asks for a narrative description about the first few days at a new school, the texts will primarily contain words related to school, teachers, subjects, new friends etc., which, however, can be varied and modified. Although the prompt language is as simple as possible, writers may well produce a response that exceeds the prompt stimulus.

Raters are advised to refer to the following tools to help them assess the range of lexical items in the prompt responses. These tools might be interesting and helpful for classroom use as well:

- The Cambridge English Key English Test (KET) Vocabulary List.
- The Preliminary English Test (PET) Vocabulary List.
  (Both of which contain detailed examples of words and topic lists considered to be representative of A2 and B1 CEFR level descriptors respectively.)
- The English Vocabulary Profile (EVP)[4], which provides a rich database of information on vocabulary for each CEFR level.

For example, when dealing with lexical items that refer to the topics Clothes and Accessories and/or Personal feelings, Opinions and Experiences, the KET and PET vocabulary topic lists can be consulted to get a good general idea of which words are considered to represent A2 and B1 level competence respectively. When cross-checked with the EVP the levels generally match the KET and PET levels. However, this is not always the case. For example the following words in the KET (A2) list are classified at a different level in the EVP:

bag, blouse, clothes, coat, dress, glasses, hat, jacket, jeans, shirt, shoes, skirt, trousers, T-shirt, watch, wear – EVP (A1)

bracelet, tie – EVP (B1)

Similarly the following words in the PET (B1) list are classified at a different level in the EVP:

easy, excited, exciting, sad, slim – EVP (A1)

crazy, fantastic, glad, healthy, lazy, mad, negative, normal, surprised, true unusual wonderful – EVP (A2)

bossy – EVP (B2)

Range versus accuracy

It is not enough for a candidate to use a large number of different words in a text to achieve a high band in the assessment of vocabulary. The words a candidate chooses must be relevant and appropriate to the topic and used in a way that enables the candidate to convey his/her ideas meaningfully. A top writer among our test takers will use vocabulary that is generally accurate enough to formulate even a more complex idea. Test takers who stay in absolutely safe language areas (e. g. language picked up in years one and two of English instruction in the Austrian school system) and avoid taking any risk will produce texts that show less evidence of mistakes. However, it is E8 policy to encourage our candidates to venture out of their safe language zone by rewarding lexical risk taking.

Texts that show a good range of vocabulary at band 7 contain a good selection of content words and phrases that are generally accurate. The candidate can sometimes vary formulations to avoid repetition. We may well expect one or more expressions to stand out and exceed what we typically expect from test takers at this level.

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4   Available at: http://www.englishprofile.org/wordlists [08 July, 2016].

Band 5 texts contain a sufficient range of mostly high frequency words that are generally used accurately. There may be some occasional mistakes, particularly when the candidate is trying to communicate a more complex idea.

Texts that show a limited range of vocabulary at band 3 contain only a rather narrow repertoire of high frequency words, but still the simple ideas that are communicated are mostly understandable even if there is some inaccurate vocabulary. With band 3 candidates we are likely to detect examples of lifting phrases from the prompt to compensate for their lexical limitations.

Finally, in a band 1 text a writer with extremely limited lexical competence in English will demonstrate this by including only a few very high frequency content words which are more often than not inaccurate and inappropriate. Band 1 writers often compensate for their lack in lexical range by heavily lifting directly from the prompt and/or by interspersing their text with L1 words in order to 'keep going', thus having the 'knock on effect' of causing frequent breakdown in communication.

Prompt lifting

The nature of some prompts makes it almost impossible to avoid lifting from the prompt. Therefore, evidence of prompt lifting does not automatically mean a text is band 4 or below. Good writers adapt and incorporate words and phrases from the prompt to accomplish the communicative task successfully. This is a skill that needs to be acknowledged positively.

Spelling

An aspect of lexical accuracy that needs addressing is spelling. It is common practice amongst teachers to take marks off for incorrect spelling. However, the emphasis on successful communication is central to the E8 context. A text containing many spelling mistakes, in particular those mistakes that change the whole meaning of a word, is very likely to disturb the reader and cause a breakdown of communication. Raters need to, and teachers should, assess the extent of breakdown and rate accordingly. However, as we encourage our writers to take risks, slight 'slips of the hand' and minor errors in spelling that do not change the meaning of the word (e. g. *seiling, especialy*) should not be penalised. In the end it is the lexical range that is more important than accuracy and a text might merit one of the higher bands despite inaccuracies.

Appendix

E8 Writing Rating Scale (June 2016)

	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Grammar	Vocabulary
7	**complete TA** • all 4 content points mentioned & 1 or more elaborated • all 6 content points mentioned & 3 or more elaborated	• clear and coherent text • cohesion on both sentence and paragraph level • cohesive devices used successfully to produce a fairly fluent text	• good range of structures • relatively high degree of control, with few inaccuracies which do not impair communication	• good range of vocabulary • generally accurate vocabulary • formulations sometimes varied to avoid repetition
6				
5	**good TA** • all 4 content points mentioned & 1 weakly elaborated OR • 5 content points mentioned & 2 or 3 elaborated OR • or all 6 content points mentioned & 1 or 2 elaborated	• mostly clear and coherent text • good sentence level cohesion as a linear sequence on a simple level • some paragraph level coherence and cohesion	• sufficient range of structures • occasional inaccuracies which do not impair communication	• sufficient range of vocabulary • occasionally inaccurate vocabulary • major errors possible when expressing more complex ideas
4				
3	**sufficient TA** • 3 content points mentioned & no elaboration OR • 2 content points mentioned & 1 elaborated • 4 content points mentioned & 1 or 2 elaborated OR • all 6 content points mentioned & no elaboration	• text often lacks clarity and/or coherence • some simple sentence level cohesion using simple connectors like *and, but* and *because* • frequent lack of coherence and cohesion on paragraph level	• limited range of simple structures • some inaccuracies which can impair communication	• limited range of vocabulary • frequently inaccurate vocabulary, generally without causing breakdown of communication • tendency to use phrases from the prompt
2				
1	**some TA** • 2 content points mentioned & no elaboration • 3 content points mentioned & no elaboration	• text not coherent • basic linear connectors (*and, then*) on word or word group level	• extremely limited range of simple structures • limited control, with frequent inaccuracies sometimes causing breakdown of communication	• extremely limited range of vocabulary • mostly inaccurate vocabulary causing frequent breakdown of communication • several chunks lifted from the prompt
0				

Text length:

- Short Prompt: 40–70 words
- Long Prompt: 120–180 words

Answers containing fewer than 20 words/60 words are *band 0.*

Downgrading:

Task Achievement: It is expected that text type requirements are met. If they are not met (missing/inappropriate salutation and/or closing formula), downgrade by one band.

Coherence and Cohesion: In long texts, paragraphing is mandatory for *bands 3–7.* If there are no visual paragraphs, downgrade by one band.

Task Achievement – Short Prompts

CPs mentioned	CPs elaborated	Band
4	1/2 (1 excellent or 2 good)	7
4	1/2 (1 good or 2 weak)	6
4	1 weak	5
4	0	4
3	2	5
3	1	4
3	0	3
2	1 good	3
2	1 weak	2
2	0	1

Task Achievement – Long Prompts

CPs mentioned	CPs elaborated	Band
6	3 or more	7
6	3 (1 or 2 weak)	6
6	2 good	6
6	1 or 2	5
6	1 weak	4
6	0	3
5	2 or 3 (all good)	6
5	2 or 3	5
5	1 good	4
5	1 weak	3
5	0	2
4	1 or 2 good	4
4	1 or 2	3
4	0	2
3	1	2
3	0	1
2	1	1