

# FCE for schools

# Writing Guide



languages

# Essay

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- In part 1 of the writing exam you have to write an essay. This question is obligatory.
- There is a question or statement for you to discuss, and also two notes to help to guide your writing.
- You must invent a third idea. This is not your opinion.
- Put a title.
- Organise your ideas into paragraphs.
- Your language must be formal, so avoid words that are too common or generic (E.g.: *things, stuff, get, etc.*) and contractions (E.g.: *can't, don't, won't, etc.*).
- The word limit is 140-190 words, but try to write as near to 190 words as possible.
- Spend 40 minutes on the task:
  - 5 minutes to plan
  - 30 minutes to write
  - 5 minutes to check your work

Look at the exam task and then the model answer. Notice that the "own idea" in paragraph three is not the writer's opinion. They put their opinion in the conclusion.

Write an essay using **all** the notes and give reasons for your point of view.

***What can people do to help  
protect the environment?***

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Notes:

1. *Recycle*
2. *Using bicycles and walking*
3. *..... (your own idea)*

Write your **essay**.

### **Protecting the Environment**

One of the things that worries people most nowadays is the environment. In the last few decades, humans have been polluting way too much, which has had a negative effect on the environment. For this reason, we must protect it from now on.

First, we ought to start paying attention to the 3 Rs: reduce, reuse and recycle. By doing so, we will reduce the quantity of rubbish, we will not throw away so many things and we will be able to recycle most of our waste.

Second, a very good idea is to stop using cars so much and start cycling or walking a little more. For example, instead of commuting by car, we can try to do it on foot or by bike.

Finally, if we really want to change things, we should teach young pupils about the dangers of contamination and pollution. It's the only way to change the future, because they are the future citizens of the world.

In conclusion, I believe that if we do these three things, we can still prevent humans from destroying the environment.

## Essay Structure

- **Introduction:** Introduce the topic in a general way and get the attention of the reader. You may use a rhetorical question to do this.
- **Paragraph 2:** Write about point 1
- **Paragraph 3:** Write about point 2.
- **Paragraph 4:** Write about your own idea. This is NOT your opinion.
- **Conclusion:** express your opinion to conclude and summarise the essay.

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## Basic Paragraph Structure

Follow this basic paragraph structure to make sure you develop your ideas completely.

1. **POINT** - A topic sentence to introduce the main point of the paragraph.
2. **EXAMPLE** - Give (an) example(s) to support your topic sentence.
3. **EXPLAIN** - Explanation of example.

First of all, it is important that we recycle and reuse whenever possible. For example, schools waste a lot of paper and many do not have recycling bins. The reason this is important is that if students and teachers recycled more, it would mean fewer trees have to be cut down.

## KEY LANGUAGE FOR ESSAYS

### Ordering your ideas:

*firstly, secondly, finally*

### Linking similar ideas:

*in addition to this, furthermore, moreover*

### Linking contrasting ideas:

*however, on the one hand / on the other hand, in contrast, although, whereas*

### Giving examples:

*for example, for instance, such as, one example of this is*

### Giving reasons:

*because, as, since*

### Giving results or consequences:

*consequently, as a result, therefore, for this reason*

### Giving a conclusion:

*in conclusion, to sum up, on balance*

### Expressing your opinion:

*in my opinion, in my view, I would say that, Personally, I think*

# Article

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- In part 2 of the writing exam you have to write an article for a magazine or website.
- The aim of an article is usually to talk about a topic that we like or that we are familiar with, but it must also entertain the reader.
- An article is usually a very personal piece of writing, so you can speak in the first person as much as you like.
- You can also address the reader directly in the second person (*you, your*) and can make jokes if you think they are appropriate.
- Your tone must be relaxed, making use of phrasal verbs and other colloquial expressions.
- Use rhetorical questions and exclamation marks to engage the reader.
- Put a title.
- Organise your ideas into paragraphs.
- The word limit is 140-190 words, but try to write as near to 190 words as possible.
- Spend 40 minutes on the task:

*A local magazine has asked readers to write an article about their favourite things about the Internet. Write the article talking about the things you do with the Internet and recommend a website to other readers.*

Look at the exam task and then the model answer.

## **TITLE**

### ***The Internet: A Great Invention***

## **INTRODUCTION**

*The Internet has changed the way we live. It started as something that we could access only through a computer, but nowadays it is everywhere, and I love it!*

## **ONE THING I LIKE**

*One of the cool things about the world wide web is that you can look up anything you want and find out the answer straight away. Isn't that fantastic? For example, imagine you are arguing with your friends about how to do something. Easy solution: go online and find the answer!*

## **WHAT I LIKE BEST**

## **& RECOMMENDATION**

*However, the greatest thing about the Internet is how you can learn tons of things very cheaply or even for free! In fact, my favourite website is [www.udemy.com](http://www.udemy.com), where people register to teach and learn about different things: music, website design, making apps, history, etc. So I totally recommend it to everyone!*

## **CONCLUSION**

*In conclusion, the Internet has a lot of great things. For me, the best are finding information and learning online. What about you? What are your favourite things about it?*

## **Article Structure**

### **Attractive title (to capture attention of the reader)**

### **Introduction paragraph**

Present the topic in a general way, but like the title, make it interesting. You also need to make it clear what the article is about.

### **Paragraph 2 (subtask 1)**

Develop your main point with reasons and examples.

### **Paragraph 3 (subtask 2)**

Develop your final key point with reasons and examples. You can include a recommendation here or in the conclusion.

### **Closing paragraph**

Summarise your main points and make a recommendation if you haven't already. Speak directly to the reader by using a question to keep them thinking about your message.

## **Useful phrases**

### **Rhetorical questions**

- Have you ever...?
- Do you ever wonder...?
- Are you one of those people who...?
- What would you say if I told you that...?
- Imagine a world in which...

### **Introducing new ideas**

- To begin with, ...
- Let's start with ...
- The coolest thing about... is...
- What attracts me most about...is...
- Another thing to consider is...
- Secondly,
- In addition to...,
- Moreover,

### **Giving your own opinion**

- I think that / In my opinion ...
- It seems to me that ...
- If you ask me, ...
- To my mind...

### **Concluding the article**

- In conclusion,
- On the whole,
- To sum up,
- To conclude,
- All in all,

# Informal Letter

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- An informal letter is a form of communication between two people who usually know each other well.
- You may have to give advice, or provide information about a certain topic.
- We can be informal in this type of writing since we are talking to a good friend, so contractions are fine. However, you should still avoid slang expressions.
- The word limit is 140-190 words, but try to write as near to 190 words as possible.
- Spend 40 minutes on the task:

Read the question below, and then the model answer. Notice the changes in tone and formality between this type of letter and a formal letter.

*An English friend of yours is visiting your city next summer. Write to him and tell him about the places he should visit and the clothes he should wear. You must also invite him to stay with you during his stay.*

Look at the exam task and then the model answer. To the left of the answer you can see how the letter is structured.

**OPENING FORMULA** Dear Jack,

**INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH** *It's great to hear from you after so long! How are you doing? I'm so excited about your visit next summer. Let me give you some tips so you can get ready.*

**SUBTASK 1: what to visit** *First of all, there are some places which you can't miss! For example, here in Granada you should totally visit the Alhambra, an ancient Muslim palace. It was nominated to become one of the new seven wonders of the world. Also, don't forget to check out St Nicholas viewpoint – you'll have the best views of the Alhambra and the whole city.*

**SUBTASK 2: what to wear** *As for clothes, remember that it can get super hot in Granada, especially for foreigners! So forget about long sleeves or trousers and just pack some shorts, T-shirts and sandals. Oh, and remember to bring a cap, too!*

**SUBTASK 2: invite him** *By the way, do you have a place to stay? If you want, I could put you up in my place. I have a spare room and it would be great to have you here.*

**CLOSING PARAGRAPH** *Anyway, I must dash now. Drop me a line soon and let me know what you think.*

**CLOSING FORMULA** Best wishes,

**SIGNATURE** Carlos

## Informal Letter Structure

### **Friendly greeting + introductory paragraph**

e.g. *Hi Tom!*

*Thank you for your letter- it was nice to hear from you! Your project about foreign customs sounds fascinating. Here in Spain we have so many, so I'll just speak about the ones from my area.*

### **Paragraph 1 (subtask 1)**

Deal with the first point included in the question with reasons and examples.

### **Paragraph 2 (subtask 2)**

Develop your next main point with reasons and examples.

### **Paragraph 3 (subtask 3)**

Develop your final key point with reasons and examples.

### **Closing paragraph (Say goodbye and request a reply)**

One thing you can do before saying goodbye is make up an excuse to 'leave'. For example:

*Anyway, I've got to go now- the kids want their dinner and it won't cook itself! But don't be a stranger, give me a call soon.*

### **Friendly close**

*All my love,*

### **Signature**

*[Your name]*

## Useful phrases

### **Greetings:**

- *Dear Sarah,*
- *Hello Sara,*
- *Hi Sara,*

### **Introductory paragraph:**

- *How's it going?*
- *How are you doing?*
- *It's great to hear from you!*
- *Sorry I haven't written for ages, but...*
- *I'm really sorry it's taken me so long to get back to you.*

### **Reacting to good news:**

- *I'm glad to hear that...*
- *Great news about your...*
- *I'm very happy to hear about...*

### **Reacting to bad news:**

- *I'm so sorry to hear about*
- *Sorry to read about*

### **Introducing paragraphs:**

- *Well, first things first*
- *One more thing,*
- *As for...*
- *Oh, by the way,*

### **Giving advice**

- *Why don't you...*
- *How about...*
- *It might be an idea to...*
- *You could always...*

### **Ending the email or letter:**

- *Well, I have to go now.*
- *Anyway, I should get going.*
- *Make sure you write soon*
- *Look after yourself.*

### **Closing the email or letter:**

- *All my love,*
- *Lots of love,*
- *All the best,*

## Part 2- Review

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- In part 2 of the writing exam you may have the choice to write a review.
- A review is usually about a TV show or film, a book, a restaurant or hotel.
- It can be a positive, negative, or balanced review. You have to make a recommendation at the end, which could be positive or negative.
- A review is semi-informal or neutral in tone. Avoid contractions but do use colourful descriptive language.
- The word limit is 140-190 words.
- Spend 40 minutes on the task:
  - 5 minutes to plan
  - 30 minutes to write
  - 5 minutes to check your work

Look at the exam task and then the model answer. Pay attention to descriptive language and the ways they try to maintain the attention of the reader.

**An international arts website is looking for reviews of novels for a new section called 'A Reader Writes'. You have decided to write a review of a novel you've recently read for this section. Describe the novel and say what you think about it. Would you recommend this novel to other people?**

Write your review in 140- 190 words in an appropriate style on the separate answer sheet.

### Bourne to Thrill

The Bourne Identity starring Matt Damon was an incredible film, but I thought the original novel by Robert Ludlum was even better. This book is so well-written, I didn't want to finish it!

The plot is gripping right from the start. When we first meet the lead character, Jason Bourne, he is being rescued from the sea. His identity is a mystery to everyone, including himself! Over the course of the novel we gradually find out who Bourne is, and follow him through a series of exciting adventures.

As well as a highly original plot line, the novel includes a number of fascinating characters, especially the villains! I only have one negative -comment: in my view, the novel is strong on action but weaker on description. However, this is a small criticism of an otherwise excellent book.

I would highly recommend The Bourne Identity to anyone who enjoys action or crime stories. However, if you prefer more descriptive or romantic novels, then you should give it a miss. Personally, I can't wait to start reading the sequel!



# Review Structure and Useful Phrases

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- **Always put a title.**
- A review should have **four or five** paragraphs.

Depending on what you have to review, you may change the structure slightly. Look at the two examples below of the review structure:

- On the left all the good and bad aspects have been separated into two paragraphs.
- On the right, the paragraphs deal with individual aspects of the hotel, restaurant or shop, so the paragraphs may contain a mixture of positive and negative comments.

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## Film/book/TV Review Structure

### Title

#### **Introduction**

Introduce the name of the film or book. You may want to say who the author or director is, and when the film or book was released.

#### **1st paragraph**

A brief synopsis- but no spoilers!

#### **2nd paragraph**

All the things you liked or didn't like (e.g acting, locations, plot...)

#### **Conclusion**

Conclude the review, indicating to the reader if your overall impression is positive or negative. Make a recommendation, either positive or negative.

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## Restaurant/hotel/ shop Review Structure

### Title

#### **Introduction**

Introduce the name of the restaurant or hotel. You may want to say where it is, or other information such as the head chef and the cuisine served.

#### **1st paragraph**

Service- Very friendly but too slow to take order

#### **2nd paragraph**

Menu/Food- High quality but little variety

#### **Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

- The film is directed by...
- The book was written by...
- The film/ book is set in...
- The film/book tells the story of.....

### **To explain the plot**

- The plot focuses on
- The story begins with ...
- A slow start
- Gripping climax
- Cliff-hanger ending

### **Evaluating various features**

- The film/series has an all star cast.
- The acting:
  - is believable/excellent/
  - disappointing/unconvincing.
- The plot is:
  - gripping/dramatic/fascinating
  - predictable/ dull/unimaginative.
- The book/film is brilliantly written/ directed.

### **Giving an opinion**

#### **Positive**

- What I really loved about ... is
- My favourite thing about... is

#### **Negative**

- The only criticism I would make is that ...
- One thing I wasn't keen on was...

#### **Making a recommendation**

- I strongly advise you (not) to ...
- Everyone should see / read ... immediately!

## Part 2- Story (FCE for schools)

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- A story tests your ability to write creatively.
- In the question, it may provide the first or last sentence of your story and some content points. You must use it where they ask.
- You will need to use lots of colourful adjectives and adverbs, as well as many different verb tenses.
- Use some direct and reported speech.
- Use lots of linking words and time phrases to 'signpost' where your story is going.
- Include a title for your story.
- Use paragraphs. Planning will help you decide what should be in each paragraph.
- Write the story ONCE in the exam. DON'T write a rough copy before writing 'the nice copy.'
- The word limit is 140-190 words, but try to write as near to 190 words as possible.
- Spend 40 minutes on the task:

Look at the exam task and then the model answer. Pay attention to the different tenses, and the variety adverbs and adjectives .

Your story must begin with this sentence : Jim knew it would be a long journey but he couldn't wait to set off.

Your story must include :

- A mobile phone
- A new friend

Jim knew it would be a long journey, but he couldn't wait to set off. He was going to visit his favourite uncle in the city. Jim hadn't seen him for ages, because he lived so far away. Jim's parents, who ran a small shop, were always too busy to take him, but they had finally agreed he was now old enough to make the five-hour train journey on his own.

He said goodbye to his parents and walked to the train station, carrying everything he needed for the week in a small rucksack. When he got on the train, the only free seat was next to a boy his own age, who looked very upset. Although Jim was quite shy, he asked him what was wrong.

It turned out that the boy, whose name was Billy, had promised to call his mother when he was safely on the train. Unfortunately, he'd left his phone at home so he had no way of contacting her. "Don't worry, you can borrow my phone" Jim said kindly. By the time his uncle picked him up a few hours later, Jim had a new friend.

## Story Structure

The story should have three main parts so three paragraphs is fine. Decide before you start writing if your story will be happy, sad or mysterious etc.

### Paragraph 1:

Set the scene and introduce the main character.

### Paragraph 2:

Introduce a twist to the story, for example a problem that the protagonist must resolve

### Paragraph 3:

Climax of the story. This may be the solution to the problem or a surprising ending.

Please don't end your story with "Then Kate woke up and it was all a dream".

### Time expressions

- Before
- At first
- After
- Later
- During
- Meanwhile
- While
- By the time
- Eventually
- Gradually
- Just then
- Suddenly
- As soon as
- Finally
- In the end

### Different ways to say:

#### Good

- Great
- Fantastic
- Excellent
- Brilliant
- Awesome

#### Bad

- Terrible
- Awful
- Rubbish
- Dreadful

#### Interesting

- Fascinating
- Captivating

#### Alternatives to The verb "say"

- Shout
- Whisper
- Exclaim
- Ask
- Suggest
- Warn
- Offer
- Promise

#### People's feelings

- Enthusiastic
- Nervous
- Optimistic
- Puzzled
- Relieved
- Determined

#### Adverbs

- Fortunately
- Luckily
- Thankfully
- Unfortunately
- Sadly
- Unexpectedly

Write the story in the past tense and use the past tense throughout the story. You will need to know the following tenses:

- Past simple
- Past continuous
- Past perfect
- Past perfect continuous
- Third conditional and wish + past participle will get you higher marks too!

Don't forget to use **direct speech** e.g. "I don't know", whispered John.

Additionally, use **reported speech** e.g. John whispered that he didn't know.

## Part 2- Report (FCE adults)

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- In part 2 of the writing exam you may have the choice to write a report.
- A report is usually written for a superior (e.g. a teacher) or a peer group (e.g. members of an English club).
- You need to give some factual information and make suggestions or recommendations.
- A report should be clearly organised and include a title and headings.
- Use an impersonal and semi-formal style.
- The word limit is 140-190 words.
- Spend 40 minutes on the task:
  - 5 minutes to plan
  - 30 minutes to write
  - 5 minutes to check your work

You work for the Student Travel Agency of your college. The principal of the college is interested in the experiences of students who have worked abroad during their summer holidays. She has asked you to write a report on the advantages and disadvantages of such work. In particular, she wants to know whether the college should recommend "working holidays" to its students.

Write your report in 140-190 words in an appropriate style.

Look at the exam task and then the model answer.

### WORKING HOLIDAYS FOR STUDENTS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of working holidays abroad. In order to obtain this information, I interviewed more than 30 students who had worked in different countries.

#### **The benefits of working holidays**

A large number of the students I spoke to said that they had enjoyed working abroad and had become more open-minded as a result. Apparently, they felt they had learnt a lot about the local people and their way of life by working side by side with them.

#### **The disadvantages of working holidays**

Not surprisingly, many students complained that they had worked too hard in certain countries. They believed that they had been exploited by their employers, who paid them very little money. According to some students, there had also been problems with documents such as work permits.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

It appears that the majority of students found the experience of working abroad very beneficial. Therefore, I believe that the college should recommend "working holidays" to its students. However, it should also warn them about the problems they could face and the precautions they need to take.

# Report Structure and Useful Phrases

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- A report should be clearly organised and include a title and headings.
- Use an impersonal and semi-formal style.

## **Report Structure**

### **Title**

#### **Introduction**

State the aim(s) of the report.

#### **Subheading 1**

Give the relevant facts about the current situation.

Usually positive points

#### **Subheading 2**

Give the relevant facts about the current situation.

Usually negative points

#### **Recommendations and conclusion statement**

Make your conclusion and recommendations.

The recommendation(s) made will usually be to improve the problems you have described earlier.

## **Useful phrases for reports**

### **Stating the purpose of the report**

- The objective/aim of this report is to evaluate / outline (a new language course at the university) ...
- ...and make suggestions/recommendations to improve ...

### **Background information**

- At the present moment, ...
- Currently, ...
- Following a survey among (students/ parents etc)

### **Recommendations and suggestions**

- I would strongly recommend that...
- The best solution would be to...
- In order to improve ..... it is necessary to..

### **Development**

- First of all,...
- In addition to this
- Furthermore,...
- Moreover,...
- Last but by no means least,...

## Part 2- Formal Letter / Email (FCE adults)

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- In part 2 of the writing exam you may have the choice to write a formal letter or email.
- Formal letters may be written to an individual or to an organisation, for example:
  - to apply for part-time or vacation work(application letter)
  - to apply for a study or scholarship opportunity (application letter)
  - to complain about something(complaint letter)
- It is a formal paper, so avoid contractions and colloquial language.
- You should always be polite and respectful, even if you complain. A useful way to achieve it especially in formal letters is to use 'modal verbs', i.e., would, could or should.
- Do not include any addresses.
- The word limit is 140-190 words.
- Spend 45 minutes on the task:
  - 5-10 minutes to plan
  - 30-35 minutes to write
  - 5 minutes to check your work

### Formal letter Structure

#### Salutation

Use **Dear Sir or Madam** if you **don't know the name** of the recipient.

**If you know the name**, use the appropriate title (Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms, Dr, etc.) along with the surname (e.g. **Dear Mr Jenkins**).

If you are writing to a newspaper editor, then use **Dear Editor**.

#### Paragraph 1

The first paragraph outlines the purpose of the letter and the reason for its sending.

#### Paragraph 2

In paragraph two, deal with the first point included in the question.

#### Paragraph 3

Develop your final main point

#### Concluding

At the end, conclude the letter and finish any thoughts mentioned before, or specify any action the recipient should take, return money, send information, etc.

In the case of a job application tell the reader when you are available for interview and thank them for their time.

#### Signing off

**Yours faithfully** if you **don't know the name** of the recipient.

**Yours sincerely** if you **know the name** of the recipient.

[Your name]

## Part 2- Letter of application (FCE adults)

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Look at the exam task. This is for a letter of application. Now read the model answer and read the comments below.

We are looking for someone in August to assist our lifeguards, provide supervision during beach activities and observe swimmers.

Write to the Lifeguard Manager, saying what your experience and qualifications are and stating the reasons why you are suitable for the job.

Write your email in 140-190 words in an appropriate style.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am looking for outdoor work during the summer holidays and I would like to apply for the position of lifeguard assistant, which I saw advertised in my university's student newspaper.

I am 20 years old and at present I am studying Physical Education. I am a strong swimmer and have recently had first aid training. I very much enjoy working with people and for the last two summers I have been working as an assistant ranger in a National Park, where I had to provide information to the public about using the park and provide emergency assistance to park users.

I think I would be a suitable candidate for the position because I have been described as calm in a crisis and someone who works well with others. Furthermore, I love to be outdoors no matter the weather.

I am available for the whole of August and would be happy to attend an interview at any time. I look forward to hearing from you at any time in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

Jorge Montero

Explain why you are writing- say where you saw the advert and what role you are applying for.

Work experience is important when applying for a job so it's a great idea to invent a fantastic career for yourself!

Try to convince your potential employer why you deserve the job. What qualities do you possess that make you the best?

In the last paragraph you need to politely ask that they consider your application and say when you are available for interview.

## Part 2- Formal Letter of Complaint (FCE adults)

Read the exam question and the model answer. Notice that in the question we have some reference to main content points (the food and service). However, you have to be creative and invent the specific problems.

Read this extract from a letter you have recently sent to a friend:

.... Oh, and by the way, don't go to Barry's Restaurant for your birthday. We went there last night - the service was awful and the food was a disaster! I complained to the head waiter but he asked me to put it in writing ...

Write your letter of complaint to the restaurant manager (around 220-260 words)

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express my disappointment with regards to my experience at your restaurant yesterday. I chose 'Joe's Diner' to impress three important business clients, after having read a glowing review in the local paper.

First of all, even though you had a variety of set meals on the menu, many dishes were unavailable. In the end we had no choice other than the onion soup and seafood salad to share between all of us.

Furthermore, the meals were not served at the same time. I asked your staff to bring all the other meals soon and in another five minutes only two were brought to us. To make matters worse, the waiter did not even apologise for the delay.

Finally, the beef steak another client had was overcooked, even though he had ordered it medium rare.

I complained about the awful service and dreadful food to your head waiter when we paid the bill, but he asked me to contact you directly in writing. I feel that a refund to the tune of at least £200 would be appropriate.

Yours faithfully,

Jane Smith

### Useful Phrases for Letters of Complaint

#### Listing Problems

- First of all,
- On top of that...
- As if that was not enough...
- To top it all off...

#### Complaining Expressions

- The... was not up to the expected standard.
- The... failed to live up to our expectations.
- We were left bitterly disappointed by...
- The quality of the customer service we received was inadequate.
- The... was an absolute disgrace. (v.strong)

#### Requesting Action

- It seems only fair that you should... (offer a full refund)
- I would appreciate it if you...
- I expect to receive compensation to the tune of (€2000) for the...

#### Sign off

- I look forward to receiving your reply.
- I expect to receive a prompt reply to this letter.
- Yours faithfully,

### Synonyms

#### Bad

- Awful
- Dreadful
- Terrible
- Rubbish

#### Good

- Outstanding
- Wonderful
- Superb
- Marvellous

#### Shocked/ Surprised

- Astonished
- Speechless
- Stunned
- Lost for words

#### Angry

- Cross
- Infuriated
- Indignant
- Enraged