

Exploring the writing tasks

In the English NCT papers you have to complete two writing tasks: one long (45 minutes) and one short (30 minutes). You are given a planning grid for the longer task, to help you plan and organise your ideas. For the shorter task you will need to make yourself some brief notes before you begin.

The two tasks test skills used in the following types of writing:

Advise	Inform	Imagine	Analyse
Argue	Explain	Explore	Comment
Persuade	Describe	Entertain	Review

The above lists are often called the writing triplets.

The writing tests are nothing to worry about and you will do lots of practice tasks to help you prepare. What it is worth remembering is that each of the types of writing requires a different style: for example, if you are asked to write a persuasive letter it is no good starting off, 'One day as I walked to school I passed a house I had never noticed before and ...' as this is more suited to the 'imagine' or 'entertain' style of writing.

In the last few years there have been a variety of tasks set, including:

1. A newspaper report describing an incident;
2. A first chapter of a detective novel;
3. A report to explain the progress of a product that is being made;
4. A letter commenting on some proposals;
5. A letter persuading local people to take action about a proposal;
6. An article for the school newsletter, aimed at parents, about an event;
7. A report for the Headteacher, analysing two alternative plans for the school;
8. A television news report describing an event.

In all the tasks, you are given some introductory information so that you understand the context of what you are writing. For example, for number 3 above, students were given information about the product being made.

1. Look through the list of eight tasks above and decide which of the writing skills each of the above is testing. For example, number 1 is testing the writing skill 'describe'. This is also called the *purpose of the writing* and is the first part of our acronym PALL (Purpose; Audience; Language; Layout) sorted. You might want to set your ideas out in a grid like the one below:

Task	Purpose	Audience	Language	Layout
1	Describe			

2. Now, decide on the intended audience for each task and then what the language and layout should be like. Remember that in the test you are often told how to set out your writing so layout may not be relevant but it is still worth considering what is usually done or the conventions of the style of writing. **Using paragraphs, correct punctuation and spelling, and using a wide and varied vocabulary is always necessary.**
3. Have a go at writing out a question that would fit each of the tasks. For example, for number 1, you might write: _____, the famous footballer, visited your school yesterday to help raise money for your new football kit. Whilst there, he offered to take part in a friendly match with students. However, he was stretchered off after 10 minutes with a broken ankle after a tackle by one of the school players. Write the report of the incident for the local newspaper.
4. After writing out a suitable question for each of the tasks plan an answer to each one.
5. Now write the first paragraph of one of the tasks.
6. Check your work carefully, remembering to think about PALL.
7. Swap your work with a partner and mark each other's work. Be positive about what they have written, even if you have to correct some mistakes.
8. Advise your partner how they could improve their work to make it even better. Remember that the examiner has hundreds of scripts to mark: make sure your partner has written an impressive and powerful first line.
9. Swap your work back again and re-write your first paragraph, taking your partner's ideas into consideration. Remember: you need an impressive and powerful first line.
10. Now, under timed conditions, finish your answer to the task.