TRINITY
COLLEGE LONDON

Writing genres – what to consider when writing in a specific genre

Summary of genres at each level

In tasks 3 and 4 of the Reading & Writing exam, candidates need to write a response to a prompt. The prompt will specify what genre (text type), is expected for the response. The table below shows the genres that are tested at each level.

ISE Foundation	ISE I	ISE II	ISE III
▶ Descriptive essay ▶ Article (magazine or online) ▶ Informal or neutral email or letter ▶ Review	▶ Descriptive essay ▶ Discursive essay ▶ Article (magazine or online) ▶ Informal email or letter ▶ Formal email or letter ▶ Review	▶ Descriptive essay ▶ Discursive essay ▶ Argumentative essay ▶ Article (magazine or online) ▶ Informal email or letter ▶ Formal email or letter ▶ Review ▶ Report	▶ Descriptive essay ▶ Discursive essay ▶ Argumentative essay ▶ Article (magazine or online) ▶ Informal email or letter ▶ Formal email or letter ▶ Review ▶ Report

Essays

The target reader for an essay is usually a teacher or tutor. A good essay requires clear paragraphing and should use linking devices (eg *but*, *however*, *in spite of*, *nevertheless*). The type of language used depends on the purpose and context. Essays are usually either neutral or formal in register.

Genre	Target reader	Organisation/format	Type of language
Descriptive essay	A teacher or tutor	Essays should have a title. Ideas should be arranged in a logical manner.	Candidate should use a wide range of descriptive language. There should be a good use of adjectives and adverbs that make the description interesting to read.
Discursive essay	A teacher or tutor	Essays should include a title, introduction, body and conclusion. Equal attention should be given to positive and negative points. The essay should be clearly organised into paragraphs. Essays must include a conclusion in which the candidate expresses his or her own views on the topic.	Candidate should use language of justification and agreeing and disagreeing.
Argument essay	A teacher or tutor	Again essays should include a title, introduction, body and conclusion. Ideas and supporting arguments should be clearly organised into paragraphs.	Candidate should use language of justification and agreeing and disagreeing.

Note: Essays at ISE Foundation are more likely to be descriptive essays and examiners would not expect the same level of development of ideas or use of discourse markers compared to higher levels.

Letters

The target reader for a letter can vary greatly but will always be specified in the question (eg a friend, an organisation, a newspaper). A good letter should have an appropriate opening and closing phrase and clear paragraphing. The first paragraph should outline the purpose for writing. The register and tone depends entirely on target reader and context.

Genre	Target reader	Organisation/format	Type of language
Formal letter	The reader is likely to be either someone in a higher position of authority to the writer or someone who the writer does not know.	The following opening and closing format should be used: *Dear Mr Brown/Mrs Smith/Ms Carter* (when name is known), *Yours sincerely*, or, *Dear Sir/Madam* (when name is not known), ... *Yours faithfully*, In a formal letter a final sentence such as: *I look forward to hearing from you.* is often used to conclude the letter.	Formal register is used. This includes using appropriate grammar (eg no contractions such as '*I'm*' or '*doesn't*') and vocabulary (eg '*dissatisfied with*' and not '*fed up with*'. Register and tone **must** be consistent.
Informal letter	The reader is likely to be a friend or a peer.	The opening and closing structures should reflect the register, for example: *Dear Tom, Hi Tom,* .... *Bye, See you soon,*	Informal register is used. This means colloquial language and contractions can be used and formal language is inappropriate. Register and tone **must** be consistent.
Neutral letter	The reader is likely to be someone the writer knows but where very informal language would be inappropriate (eg a teacher or tutor).	The opening and closing structures should reflect the register, for example: *Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms, Dear Tom,* .... *Thank you, Bye,*	A neutral register is used. Contractions can be used but colloquialisms and very informal or very formal language would be inappropriate.

Note: Letters at ISE Foundation are likely to be informal or neutral and, due to the length of output (70-100 words), will consist of fewer paragraphs.

Emails

The target reader for an email can vary greatly but will always be specified in the question (eg a friend, an organisation, a newspaper). A good email should have an appropriate opening and closing phrase and clear paragraphing. The first paragraph should outline the purpose for writing. The register and tone depends entirely on the target reader and context.

Genre	Target reader	Organisation/format	Type of language
Formal email	The reader is likely to be either someone in a higher position of authority to the writer or someone who the writer does not know.	The following opening and closing format should be used: *Dear Mr Brown/Mrs Smith/Ms Carter,* *Dear Kate,* (it is the generally the accepted practice in British companies to use only the first name of colleagues, while still using a formal register for the email) .... *Kind regards,* *Best regards,* Dear Sir/Madam, is not often used in an email as writers generally know the person to whom they are writing. As in a formal letter, a final sentence such as: *I look forward to hearing from you,* is often used to conclude the email.	Formal register is used. This includes using appropriate grammar (eg no contractions such as *I'm* or *doesn't*), vocabulary (eg *dissatisfied with* and not *fed up with*). Register and tone **must** be consistent.
Informal email	The reader is likely to be a friend or a peer.	The opening and closing structures should reflect the register, for example: *Dear Tom, Hi Tom,* .... *Bye, See you soon,*	Informal register is used. This means colloquial language and contractions can be used and formal language is inappropriate. Note that abbreviations such as those used in texting are **not** appropriate, eg '*Thanx*' or '*R U going?*' Register and tone **must** be consistent.
Neutral email	The reader is likely to be someone the writer knows but where very informal language would be inappropriate (eg a teacher or tutor).	The opening and closing structures should reflect the register, for example: *Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms, Dear Tom,* .... *Thank you, Bye,*	A neutral register is used. Contractions can be used but colloquialisms and very informal or very formal language would be inappropriate.

Note: Emails at ISE Foundation are likely to be informal and, due to the length of output (70-100 words), will consist of fewer paragraphs.

Articles, reviews and reports

Genre	Target reader	Organisation/format	Type of language
Article	A reader of a newspaper, magazine or website.	Articles must have a title or headline. They may have a subtitle/subheading or start with a rhetorical question. Articles should be clearly organised into paragraphs, including an introduction, main body and conclusion. Articles should include the writer's opinion and often have a persuasive element. The conclusion should sum up the main point of view that the writer wants to express.	Articles should always be engaging and the opening lines should catch the reader's interest. Articles often contain language of description with examples and anecdotes. As articles should engage the reader, language should be varied and colourful. The register depends on the topic and target reader and so can be informal or formal. Whatever register the candidate chooses to adopt must be used consistently throughout the article.
Review	Usually the reader of a magazine or website.	Often similar to articles with a headline/title. Reviews should be clearly organised into paragraphs. There should be a description of the event, book, film, etc and the writer's personal opinion should be clear. There should also be a recommendation to the reader.	Descriptive language is essential and a variety of adjectives and adverbs should be used. Language to express opinion, with justification should also be used. Reviews are generally neutral or informal. An overly formal register would generally be inappropriate.
Report	Usually someone in a higher position of authority such as a teacher, employer or college principal.	Reports should have a title explaining their purpose. They should be clearly organised into paragraphs and may include headings. Recommendations or suggestions are often made in the final paragraph.	Language should be formal and impersonal as information presented is based on facts and not opinion. Any suggestions or recommendations should be based on factual information.

Note: At ISE Foundation, introductions and conclusions are likely to be a single sentence rather than a complex paragraph, which is acceptable at this level. At ISE Foundation and ISE I, reviews will be less developed and are likely to be a simple description, with some opinion and a simple recommendation, eg '*I think everyone should read this book.*'