

**Writing skills practice: An informal email or letter – exercises**

Look at the email and do the exercises to improve your writing skills.

**Preparation**

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–j next to the numbers 1–10.

- |         |                                       |    |  |
|---------|---------------------------------------|----|--|
| 1.....  | no doubt                              | a. | to organise  |
| 2.....  | to settle in                          | b. | to start something in a particular way   |
| 3.....  | finals                                | c. | to feel relaxed in a new home or place   |
| 4.....  | a fresher                             | d. | certainly; definitely  |
| 5.....  | to set up                             | e. | a student in their first year of university  |
| 6.....  | halls (of residence)                  | f. | the exams students take at the end of a university course                            |
| 7.....  | pretty much                           | g. | spoken with grammatical mistakes; not spoken fluently                                |
| 8.....  | to go about doing something           | h. | student dormitories or accommodation   |
| 9.....  | a year-abroad programme               | i. | almost   |
| 10..... | broken (language), e.g. broken German | j. | a scheme which sends university students to study at a foreign university for a year |

Cancel

New message

Send

To: **Ellie**  
Subject: **Hi :)**

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Hi Ellie

It's Jack's **mate** Dan here. **Hope all's going well at uni** and term's started well. I can't believe you're in your final year already! We had our fresher's week a couple of weeks ago and now term is in full swing with lectures pretty much all day Monday to Friday! I'm at Leeds doing the same engineering degree as you. The amount of work was a bit overwhelming at first, but by and large the course is going OK. I've settled into life in halls very well and have met **loads of** really great, down-to-earth people.

You're probably wondering why I'm writing to you **out of the blue** like this. I spoke to your brother and he said you wouldn't mind if I got in touch with you. We've been given the option next year of doing the same year-abroad programme that you did last year in Austria and I just wanted to **pick your brains about a couple of things**. Basically, **they've given us** a list of places that do a similar degree course to mine but I'm not really sure where to start in terms of choosing one. The options they've given us are Poland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Greece. **I've never been to any of those countries before and, to be honest, I don't know much about any of them and my foreign language skills only stretch to a bit of broken French – languages were never my strong point!** I just wondered how important you think it is to be able to speak the language of the host university country. Does the organisation set up language classes for the foreign students? And another thing I was wondering about were the lectures and exams. Are they in English? Or do you have to do them in another language?

Another thing I wanted to ask you about was accommodation. **How did you go about looking for a place?** I remember Jack saying you stayed with a family at first before moving into a shared flat with other foreign students. Did the organisation help you out or did you find your own accommodation?

**One more thing, did you manage to get a scholarship or grant to cover some of the expenses? Do you know how I can go about applying for one?**

Sorry to bombard you with so many questions, but I really appreciate you helping me out and any advice about anything connected to the year abroad will be gratefully received!

**Thanks so much and hope all goes well with your finals. No doubt you'll pass with flying colours!**

Best wishes

Dan

## Top Tips for writing

1. *Begin and end appropriately.*
  - **Beginning:** Dear / Hi + name
  - **Ending:** Best wishes / Love + name
2. *Use an informal style. Use contractions and informal expressions.*
3. *Group similar ideas in the same paragraph.*
4. *Use a phrase to close the email or letter.*
  - **Hope it all goes well.**
  - **Best of luck with ...**
  - **Hope to hear from you soon.**
  - **Write soon.**
5. *Include complex language to show your range of vocabulary and expression.*

**1. Check your understanding: true, false or not given**

Read the sentences and answer 'true' if the information can be found in the text, 'false' if the information says the opposite to the text or 'not given' if the information cannot be found in the text.

1. Dan's in the second term of his first year at university.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
2. The course is going as Dan expected.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
3. This is the first time Dan has asked Ellie for advice on this issue.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
4. Dan has been offered a placement in the same country that Ellie went to.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
5. Dan can get by in a handful of languages.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
6. Dan will need to sort out accommodation for his stay.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
7. Dan is highly likely to get a scholarship or grant.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given
8. Dan gives some encouragement to Ellie about her final exams.  
a. True                                      b. False                                      c. Not given

## 2. Check your understanding: matching

Match the words and phrases from the text with the definitions and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1..... at a high level of activity; fully in progress.                      | a. to bombard someone with questions |
| 2..... on the whole; mainly   | b. out of the blue                   |
| 3..... unexpectedly   | c. by and large                      |
| 4..... to get information from someone who knows more about a certain topic | d. to pass with flying colours       |
| 5..... a particular skill or ability that someone has                       | e. to pick someone's brains          |
| 6..... to ask lots of questions, one after the other                        | f. down-to-earth                     |
| 7..... to pass with very high marks   | g. someone's strong point            |
| 8..... describes someone who is practical and reasonable                    | h. in full swing                     |

## 3. Check your understanding: gap fill

Complete the sentences with a word or phrase from the box.

down-to-earth	pick your brains	bombarded her with questions	strong point
pass with flying colours	out of the blue	by and large	was in full swing

- When we got to the party it \_\_\_\_\_. Everyone was there having an amazing time.
- Ally really struggles with maths, but \_\_\_\_\_ she's doing OK in the rest of her subjects.
- This morning I got a message \_\_\_\_\_ from an old school friend. I haven't seen him for years.
- You know a lot about computers. I want to buy a new one. Can I \_\_\_\_\_ about what to look for when I'm buying one?
- Music is definitely not my brother's \_\_\_\_\_. I don't know anyone else who always sings so out of tune!
- As soon as the president finished her speech, the journalists \_\_\_\_\_.
- He's worked so hard for his exams. I'm sure he'll \_\_\_\_\_.
- I met a famous film star once. I thought he'd be a bit pretentious and arrogant but he was actually very \_\_\_\_\_.

### Discussion

Do you think it's a good idea to study at a foreign university? Why or why not?