
The Cambridge Delta assessment criteria for the Background Essay explained

Here are the criteria with notes on each. If any are still unclear to you, you can post a question at www.eltconcourse.com/contact/contact.html and we will try to help.

1. Quality of writing: Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively present an essay which:
 - a) is written in language which is clear, accurate, easy to follow and is cohesive and clearly ordered
 - i. Proofread carefully for slips, typographical errors and syntax errors. Get someone else to proofread it if you can. Avoid comma splices
 - ii. Make sure that you are using conjunction and other discourse markers clearly. E.g., if you have a sentence beginning with *So* or *Therefore* are you certain that what you say next really does follow?
 - iii. Use subheadings at all stages so that you can guide the reader. Make sure, however, that the headings you use match the text which follows
 - iv. Make sure that you refer back and forward in the essay.
 - The issues you identify for learners should be with those aspects of the topic which you have analysed
 - The solutions you suggest in the last part should address the issues you have described
 - b) uses appropriate terminology accurately
 - i. Do not throw in terminology for its own sake
 - ii. Terminology which is understood at an initial-training level need not be defined
 - iii. Define all other terms. Do not, for example, use a term like *periphrastic* without making it clear (by definition or example) that you know what it means
 - c) refers to and references key sources

Read widely and don't rely on grammars written for learners alone. You need to demonstrate a better depth of understanding
 - d) follows the conventions of a standard referencing system for in-text referencing and the bibliography

See the guide to writing a background essay and know how to reference accurately
 - e) respects the word limit (2,000-2,500 words) and states the number of words used.
 - i. If your essay close to the lower limit, it may well mean that you have not discussed things at the required depth or have not exemplified fully. Look back at what you have written and ask two questions:
 - Is what I have written clear and complete?
 - Does this statement need more exemplification?
 - ii. Do not exceed the limit – there is no leeway and you cannot get a grade better than pass for an essay over the word limit. In serious cases, it may even fail.

2. Clarity of topic: Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively make clear the topic of the essay by:
 - a) identifying for analysis a specific area of the grammar, lexis, phonology or discourse system of English, or a skills area (listening, speaking, reading or writing)
 - i. Make sure that the reader can know what your subject is only by reading the title. There are no prizes for obscure, catchy or cute titles
 - ii. State clearly in the introduction what your topic actually is and keep it in mind. See the guide for more
 - b) defining the scope of the area they will analyse with reference to e.g. learners, teaching approach, method, learning context, learner needs or text type
This is a critical area.
 - i. 2a above refers to the area (listening, reading, tense system, lexical system, collocation etc.)
 - ii. 2b refers to the scope – i.e., what part of the larger picture are you painting?
 - iii. Make sure your scope is sufficiently narrow for you to analyse it in enough depth but sufficiently broad for you to show a range of ideas and knowledge. Do not be afraid to revisit your title and scope if you find you are too narrowly focused and don't have enough to say or too broadly focused and are reduced to superficiality
 - c) explaining with reference to classroom experience, reading and research why they have chosen this area
Do this in three parts:
 - i. Refer to your reading (quote if you can)
 - ii. Refer to your experience (with an example or two)
 - iii. Refer to the value of the topic for learners generally or in a specific setting
 - d) making all parts of the essay relevant to the topic and coherent
 - i. Keep an eye on your title. If it refers to a level, are you analysing and discussing problems for students at that level?
 - ii. Are you following a coherent structure such as that set out in the guide?
 - e) following through in later parts of the essay on key issues identified in earlier parts.
 - i. If you have analysed a particular area of your focus, make sure you refer to the problems learners and teachers have
 - ii. If you have identified a problem, have you identified and described a solution?
3. Analysis and issues: Successful candidates can effectively demonstrate an understanding of the specific area by:
 - a) analysing the specific area with accuracy, identifying key points
 - i. Be accurate. Check that what you say is actually true
 - ii. Prioritise. Are you identifying key points for learners in the chosen setting / at the chosen level / for the chosen purposes?
 - b) showing awareness of a range of learning and teaching problems occurring in a range of learning contexts.
 - i. Consider your own setting and then
 - ii. think outside your own setting to show that you are aware of other possibilities
 - iii. Know how **a range** of languages work both in terms of systems and skills. Do not only focus on the 1st languages of your own students.

4. Suggestions for teaching: Successful candidates demonstrate that they can effectively draw on experience and research to:
- a) outline and show familiarity with relevant key procedures, techniques, resources and/or materials
 - i. You need to outline procedures etc. in enough detail for the reader to understand what you mean without reference to the appendices
 - ii. Beware of using expressions such as *I would ...* because these suggest that you have never done any of this and are not familiar with the area
 - b) evaluate how the selected procedures, techniques, resources and or materials might be used effectively in classroom practice
 - Evaluation means:
 - i. Saying how it helps and why
 - ii. Noting any drawbacks
 - c) demonstrate how the procedures, techniques, resources and/or materials address points raised under 'Analysis and issues'.
 - i. See the points under 1 a) iv, 2d and 2e above
 - ii. Do not suggest solutions for problems you have not identified earlier
 - iii. Make sure you suggest solutions for the key problems you have identified