

The Ultimate OET Writing Guide



LANGUAGE

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WRITING GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

In OET Writing you will have 45 minutes to read a set of case notes and write a letter -- usually a referral letter, but sometimes a discharge or transfer letter -- to a fellow professional or layperson. The case notes and TASK you receive will be profession specific; that is, doctors receive medical case notes, nurses receive nursing case notes etc. You probably write letters like this all the time in your current practice; however, keep in mind that in order to get the score you want on the OET test you may have to change the way you write to satisfy the examiners.

You should certainly practice writing **OET sub-tests** before test day and it is a very good idea to use a '**method**' while you practice and on test day.

E2Language recommends the following method:

- Read the TASK carefully
- Interpret case notes correctly
- Select relevant case notes
- Transform case notes accurately
- Organise your writing logically

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Please note that this method is not necessarily step-by-step. You will need to refer back to each part of the method a number of times throughout the duration of the test.

Nevertheless, the method provides a solid set of instructions that will help you to understand what you need to do on test day to improve your chances of success on this sub-test.

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READ THE TASK

The OET Writing sub-test goes for **45 minutes**, the first five minutes of which is only for reading. The first thing you should do during the **five minutes reading time** is read the TASK carefully. The TASK is located at the bottom of the case notes and looks something like this:

TASK

Using the information in the case notes, write a letter to Ms Samantha Bruin, Senior Nurse at Greywalls Nursing Home, 27 Station Road, Greywalls, who will be responsible for Mr Baker's continued care at the Nursing Home.

Usually, the **TASK** will provide you with:

- The recipient's name
- The recipient's position/profession
- The recipient's place of work and address
- A reference to what type of letter you must write: referral, discharge, transfer or information

You can also see or infer from the TASK whether the recipient knows the patient or whether you are introducing the patient to the recipient for the first time. Knowing this information is critical for case note selection. For example, in the TASK above, we can infer that Ms Bruin knows Mr Baker already.

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INTERPRETING CASE NOTES CORRECTLY

Having read the **TASK**, you now know **WHO** you are writing to and **WHY**, so you should begin reading the case notes, paying special attention to case notes that are pertinent to the **TASK**.

The case notes will not be written in perfect sentences and are somewhat challenging to understand. As such, you will need to 'interpret' them. It is critical that you interpret the case notes correctly because misinterpretations will result in incorrect information being placed in your letter.

Sometimes the case notes will be written in short ungrammatical phrases, such as:

NURSING MANAGEMENT AND PROGRESS

daily dressings surgery incision site

A case note may also use an abbreviation, such as:

DISCHARGE PLAN

Social worker organised 2-wk hire of walker

In addition, case notes may even include symbols such as arrows.
For example:

PAST MEDICAL HISTORY

Eyesight ^ due to cataracts removed 16 mths ago

It is also critical to pay attention to the sub-heading or category that a specific case note is under. Compare these two case notes:

PAST MEDICAL HISTORY

hernia

ADMISSION DIAGNOSIS

hernia

There are important differences between a hernia mentioned in 'past medical history' and a hernia mentioned in 'admission diagnosis'.

SELECTING CASE NOTES

After you have read and correctly interpreted the case notes you will then need to think more carefully about case note relevance. Considering the body of your letter should only be between **180 and 200 words**, you simply cannot – and you certainly should not – include all of the case notes.

Again, you need to make sure you are writing a relevant letter, and that largely depends on the **TASK**. Make sure you understand the TASK fully and you know who you are writing to and why. Write the letter for – and only for – the recipient, keeping his or her needs in mind at all times.

Selecting case notes, however, is challenging because while some case notes will clearly be relevant and irrelevant, others will be semi-relevant. You have to make decisions about which case notes to include and which case notes to ignore. This is why practice is so important: By practicing the OET writing sub-test, you will develop an understanding of how many case notes you should include in order to write an appropriate length. You do not want to write a letter on test day that is well below or well above the word count.

Try using these tips to help you select relevant case notes!

1.
**UNDERSTAND
THE TASK
FULLY!**

2.
**WHO ARE
YOU WRITING
TO?**

3.
**WHY ARE
YOU WRITING
TO THEM?**

4.
**WHAT CASE
NOTES ARE
RELEVANT?**

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ORGANISING CASE NOTES LOGICALLY AND COHERENTLY

‘Organising case notes’ and the following step ‘transforming case notes’ happen simultaneously while you write. In other words, as you organise case notes into logical paragraphs you will also be transforming them into accurate sentences.

The structure of your letter is critical for success. In short, it needs to be ‘readable’, not just grammatically, but it should flow from beginning to end in a coherent and logical way. Although there’s no ‘set structure’ for OET writing, there are some guidelines that you should keep in mind when organising your letter:

1. The introductory sentence/paragraph should contain the reason why you are writing the letter (i.e. refer, discharge, transfer) and the main medical issue. As a rule, important information should be prioritised or brought to the top of the letter; don’t bury the important information deep in the letter.
2. Paragraphs should contain single ‘themes’. A paragraph should not contain mixed information; it should be clear what the paragraph is about, not confusing.
3. The internal structure of the paragraph should also flow from beginning to end. So, while your whole letter should flow from beginning to end so should your paragraphs be structured coherently.

You may want to spend a minute or two ‘planning’ your letter structure before you begin writing.

Ask yourself:

- What’s the most important issue?
- What’s the secondary issue?
- What else does the reader need to know?

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Sketch out a simple paragraph structure before you start writing because once you start writing it’s very difficult to restructure, for you are writing on paper not a computer.

TRANSFORMING CASE NOTES ACCURATELY

Grammatical accuracy accounts for 20% of your mark; however, if your grammar is incomprehensible then it will affect much more than 20% of your overall grade. Consider the difference in meaning from these three verb tenses:

- Mr Baker **experiences** migraines. (**regularly**)
- Mr Baker **experienced** migraines. (**in the past**)
- Mr Baker **is experiencing** migraines. (**currently**)

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You need to transform case notes into grammatically accurate sentences so that the meaning is clear to the reader and reflects the intended meaning of the case note.

You should also make sure that you include a range of different sentence types – some short, some complex, some active, some passive; but remember that the aim is to not include various sentence types but to communicate information as clearly as you possibly can that will require you to use varied sentence types and grammar.

After you have finished your letter, give it a once over for any silly grammar mistakes. Many candidates make mistakes with:

- Singular and plural nouns (pimple vs pimples)
- Countable and uncountable nouns (blood vs bloods)
- Articles (a headache vs the headache)
- Verbs (suffers from vs is suffering from vs has suffered from etc.)
- Prepositions (please monitor for anaemia / he is on medication)

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PROPER LETTER FORMAT

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There are different ways to format your letter but here is a standard approach:

Recipient title and full name	Ms Samantha Bruin
Profession/Position	Senior Nurse
Hospital/Clinic name	Greywalls Nursing Home
Hospital/Clinic address	27 Station Road, Greywalls
(Today's date)	dd/mm/yyyy
Salutation	Dear Ms Bruin,
Re: Patient name, patient age	Re. Gerald Baker, aged 63 years
Introduction	-
Paragraph 1	-
Paragraph 2	-
(Paragraph 3)	-
Closing Phrase	If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Sign off	Yours sincerely
Your profession	Charge Nurse

As you can see, if you memorise the letter format most of your precious writing time can be spent on the introduction and 'body paragraphs'.

One final -- and CRITICAL -- thing I want to leave you with is this: There is no set structure for the letter. The structure of the letter entirely depends on the TASK and the set of case notes you receive on test day. If you remember one thing, remember this: Be Flexible - put yourself in the shoes of the recipient and give them what they need for the case of the patient.



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