

Writing Skills

Cambridge
First Certificate

A problem-solving approach

Norman Coe, Robin Rycroft
and Pauline Ernest

TIONS

AN

Topsoil

Chalk

Basalt

Rock pebbles

the mains electricity is left. Turn it to ON, and...

water supply, turn on the...

the sink in the bathroom...

an hour to come through...

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Cambridge University Press

Writing Skills

A problem-solving approach for
upper-intermediate and more
advanced students

*Norman Coe, Robin Rycroft and
Pauline Ernest*

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To the student

This book concentrates on the skills that you need when you write in English. When you listen, speak, read or write, you need a knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar; these aspects of language are not specific to writing, and it is not the main aim of this book to improve them. Our main aim is to help learners to put sentences together so that the things that they write will be easy to read and understand.

Here are some of the reasons why a written piece is sometimes difficult to understand:

- 1 The ideas are not in an **order** that easily makes sense.
- 2 The ideas are not grouped together into distinct **paragraphs**.
- 3 The writer does not begin his piece – or a paragraph – with an **introduction** that starts the reader in the right direction.
- 4 The writer does not end his piece – or a paragraph – with a **conclusion** that sums up the point he wants to make.
- 5 The **relation** between the ideas is not clear because the writer has not used words like *although*, *for example*, *on the other hand*, and so on.
- 6 The writer's **attitude** is not clear; is he, for example, describing, suggesting or criticising something?
- 7 The piece contains ideas that are **not relevant** to what the writer wants to express.
- 8 The sentences do not have clear **punctuation**; there are commas (,) and full stops (.) without any good reason.

The material in this book practises all these specific aspects of writing. Obviously, different learners will vary in their strong and weak points, and they will therefore need to concentrate on different aspects. With the material in this book you are free to do this; you can vary the order in which you do the practices so as to suit your specific needs.

We believe that students learn a lot by working together in groups to solve a problem or make a decision. We feel that learners should share their knowledge, compare their opinions, and discuss their ideas in small groups before going on to classwork or individual work. The instructions for each exercise include suggestions about ways of working with the material. However, these are only suggestions, and different teachers and classes will adjust them to their own ideas and circumstances.

1 Informal letters

1.1 PUNCTUATION

Notice the use of capital letters in the following expressions:

- 1 Mrs Ashley, Mr Brown, Mr and Mrs Thompson, Lady Grey, Sir Geoffrey Land, Dr James, Professor Ayer, etc.
- 2 the Foreign Secretary, the Minister of Finance, the Archbishop of York, etc.
- 3 Oxford Street, Hyde Park, Trafalgar Square, Redhill Gardens, etc.
- 4 Lake Windermere, the River Thames, Mount Everest, etc.
- 5 Monday, Tuesday, etc.; January, February, etc.; Christmas, Easter, etc.; Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, etc.
- 6 French, English, Spanish, etc.; Frenchman, Englishman, Spaniard, etc.
- 7 the Tate Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, the Ritz Hotel, etc.

Now, working individually, indicate where you need capital letters in the following sentences. Then compare your answers with those of others.

- 8 was professor blunt working for the queen of england?
- 9 the british prime minister met the german foreign minister for talks.
- 10 is lake geneva near mont blanc?
- 11 on thursday we're going to the museum of natural history.
- 12 the suggestion was made by captain jones on behalf of general taylor.
- 13 is dr spock american or canadian?
- 14 last year good friday was on april 1st.



1.2 SCRAMBLED SENTENCES

The following sentences go together to form a complete letter, but they are in the wrong order. Working in groups of two or three, put them in the right order, and decide how the words and phrases underlined help to link the text together. Then compare your answers with those of other groups.

Dear Dorothy,

- a) But when we started eating, the noise died down.
- b) As you may remember, it was Rosemary's birthday last Saturday, and she wanted to do something different.
- c) (You remember it, don't you? Just beside the old castle.)
- d) Well, nothing more to tell you, just now; hope to see you at Christmas.
- e) I mean, life goes on as always, and nothing special seems to happen.
- f) Fortunately, there was a bright moon, so we were able to make our way there without much trouble.
- g) It was then that we suddenly became aware of the stillness of the night, and although it sounds odd to say so, the silence seemed even louder than the noise we had been making before.
- h) Thank you very much for your letter, which arrived this morning.
- i) All in all, it was an unforgettable experience - I'm sure Rosemary's picnic will be talked about for some time.
- j) It was really my turn to write, as you say, but I seem to have so little news these days.
- k) As you can imagine, there was a great deal of messing about when we got there - people shouting and chasing each other around, and so on.
- l) Last weekend was fun, though.
- m) Well, anyway, we all met at the Red Lion, had a few drinks there, and then went on down to the wood.
- n) Instead of the usual party at home she decided to have a midnight picnic in Glover Wood.

Love,

Jenny.

1.3 LINKING WORDS AND PHRASES

In the following letter the linking words and phrases are missing. Working in groups of two or three, choose the most appropriate phrase from the ones given below. Then compare your answers with those of other groups.

Dear Harry,

Remember that I told you I was trying to get a job at ICTL?

(1), I finally managed to get one! Of course, I haven't been working there long, (2) I can already tell that it's a wonderful place to work. All the staff, (3) the directors, are very friendly with everybody, and (4), they have marvellous facilities for the employees. (5), there's a bar and gym, and lots of other things.

I'm called the Safety Equipment Officer. It (6) sound like an impressive title, but it's not a very accurate description of what I do. My main job is to provide protective clothing, (7) overalls, helmets, and so on. I estimate what the different departments will need, and (8) I order it from the suppliers.

(9) I make sure that the various departments have everything they want. (10), stationery is also my responsibility.

(11), I have to supply all the offices with paper, envelopes, and so on. I find the job very interesting (12) I get the chance to go all over the factory and to meet everybody. (13) the pay is a lot better than in my old job.

(14), that's my news. What about yours? Drop me a line when you have time. Regards to your family, and best wishes to you.

Terry

- 1 a) Then b) Well c) And
- 2 a) but b) because c) so
- 3 a) until b) and c) even
- 4 a) so b) what's more c) on the other hand
- 5 a) For instance b) However c) Even
- 6 a) can b) could c) may
- 7 a) such as b) namely c) as
- 8 a) then b) after c) so
- 9 a) By the way b) Anyway c) In this way
- 10 a) However b) Although c) But
- 11 a) Secondly b) In other words c) Also
- 12 a) why b) because c) then
- 13 a) Besides b) Beside c) On the other hand
- 14 a) At the end b) Anyway c) After all

Informal letters

Each of the following sentences has a blank where there should be a linking word or phrase. Put in one of the above words and phrases so that the relation between the two statements is made clear.

- 15 The pay and conditions are very good., it's only five minutes' walk from where I live.
- 16 I didn't apply for the job I didn't think I had much chance of getting it.
- 17 A lot of professional groups, doctors and lawyers, have strong associations that protect their members' rights.
- 18 The hours are short, the pay's excellent, and the people I work with are very nice., it's a great job.
- 19 You think it's boring, but in fact it's very interesting.
- 20 All my relatives were at the wedding, my cousins from Australia.
- 21 At first I didn't feel happy with so much responsibility., now I feel quite confident that I can manage.
- 22 There are several things that make it a nice place to live., there's a park right across the road.

1.4 ATTITUDE WORDS AND PHRASES

The blanks in the following letter must be filled with words and phrases that bring out the writer's attitude to what he is saying. Working in groups of two or three, choose the most appropriate expression from the ones given below. Then compare your answers with those of other groups.

My dear Francesca,

Thank you very much for your letter. (1)....., it makes an old uncle very happy to know that his niece is interested in what he thinks about her ideas and plans. (2)....., you are thinking of leaving home. (3)....., I must say that I think it would be a very unwise thing to do.

Fran, I know that you are a very sensible girl, and I also know that, (4)....., your parents have brought you up to think for yourself. In your 'open' family you will have heard all the arguments for and against this sort of thing many times and, (5)....., you won't be interested in hearing them again, least of all from me. Nevertheless, I really must say something: what you are thinking of doing could make you (and everyone else) very unhappy.

You say that you find school boring, and that what you do there is irrelevant. (6)....., I agree with you, but (7)....., if

you want to do anything with the rest of your life, you have got to keep going just a little bit longer – at least until you've got some paper qualifications. Without them you won't be able to do anything at all. (8) _____, you will have thought about these things, but I wonder if you have considered how really serious they are.

Then, (9) _____, you say that you're going to live with your boyfriend in London! As far as I remember, he hasn't even got a job, has he? What on earth are you going to live on? Life on the dole might be bliss for a few months, but I can assure you that it won't last for much more. (10) _____, just think about it – you're a bright, intelligent girl. Just how long do you think you could be happy vegetating with an unemployed motor mechanic? You and I really need to have a serious talk together.

So, Fran, please come and see me before you finally decide. If anything awful ever happened to you, I'd never forgive myself.

Fondest love, as ever,
Uncle Patrick.

- 1 a) Naturally b) Perhaps c) Surely
- 2 a) In my opinion b) To my surprise c) Actually
- 3 a) Fortunately b) Frankly c) Undoubtedly
- 4 a) honestly b) presumably c) quite properly
- 5 a) of course b) perhaps c) seriously
- 6 a) Quite likely b) Unfortunately c) Broadly speaking
- 7 a) to my surprise b) obviously c) eventually
- 8 a) Undoubtedly b) To be frank c) Unfortunately
- 9 a) generally b) actually c) to my surprise
- 10 a) Seriously b) Of course c) Naturally

1.5 REPORTING WORDS

There are two reported speech versions of the following direct speech. Working in groups of two or three, decide which you prefer and why. In particular consider the role of the reporting word blame. Then discuss your conclusion with other groups.

'Don't talk to me about the kitchen,' said Tom. 'It was Eve who got everything out, and then spilt things all over the place.'

- a) Tom blamed Eve for the mess in the kitchen.
- b) Tom told me not to talk to him about the kitchen. He said that it had been Eve who had got everything out, and had then spilt things all over the place.

Now report the following items of direct speech, choosing in each case one of the reporting words given. Then compare your answers with those of others.

praise; state; suggest; ask; think; explain; call; insist; order; advise.

- 1 'You walk straight down this road until you get to a big church on the left,' said Angela. 'Then you turn right, walk along for about a hundred yards, and you'll see the post office on the left.'
- 2 'Listen, Dick. You really ought to write and explain what's happened,' said Mrs Jones. 'In fact, if I were you, I'd write the letter straightaway.'
- 3 'You're a fool, Brian,' said Sara.
- 4 'You realise, of course, Bill,' Penny said, 'that in this weather it would probably make more sense for us to go by train. What do you think?'
- 5 'If I've told you once, I've told you a dozen times: somebody must pay for the broken window,' said the young lady.

Now choose two or three of the reporting words that you have not so far used; write examples of direct speech and reported speech to illustrate the use of these words.

1.6 PARAGRAPH COMPLETION

In the following letter the first two paragraphs are complete, but the next three are progressively less complete. Working in groups of two or three, complete the third and fourth paragraphs with sufficient information to explain the sentence that introduces them, as in paragraph two. You must invent the whole of the fifth paragraph, starting with the phrase given.

Dear Patty,

Thank you for your letter. It was very nice to read all your news, and it was great of you to invite us all to come over for Christmas. Unfortunately, I really don't think we'll be able to take you up on it - and for so many reasons.

For a start, I just don't think that I could get away from the office. I know I really should take a break, but it's impossible at the moment. We're having a lot of trouble with that new rolling mill I told you about, and what's more, the engineers' union want a 25% rise. As you know, times aren't too healthy on the sales side, so the negotiations will no doubt take time.

Another thing is that Charlie wants to go and stay with these friends of his in Norway. You perhaps remember



Also, Sally's talking about moving to London, and you can imagine what that would involve.

Last but not least,

So really, what with all of the family likely to be away for some or all of the time, I don't think we'd be very good company for you. I do hope you understand, and that we'll be able to come and see you early in the New Year.

Love from all the family.

Cardice

1.7 TEXT COMPARISON

Working in groups of two or three, decide which of the following letters you prefer and why. Then discuss your decision with other groups. Finally, rewrite the letter you did not like.

Dear Aunt Nellie,

I have just started work. I'm going to tell you about my experiences.

I'm working in an office. It is an insurance company. There are forty other people in the office. I am a typist here. I type letters mostly. My boss is called Mr Merriam. He's the manager of the Claims Department. He gives me my work. When I have typed it, I give it back to him. He's very kind to me.

Some of the people in the office are very nice. Some are very rude, some are very noisy, and some are very funny. I have made friends with a girl called Susan. She's a typist too. She doesn't work for Mr Merriam. She works for Mrs Jones. Mrs Jones is the manager of the Accounts Department. She is very nice.

The work is easy. As you know, I have been trained to type, so typing is easy for me. The office is very clean. It is very modern, too. But the atmosphere is strange. It is difficult to get used to the atmosphere.

It is simple to travel from my flat to the office. I get a number 26. I change at Biddam Square. I get a number 12 from there. It takes about 20 minutes. I have lunch in a cafe with Susan. It costs about a pound. It's quite good value.

Love to Uncle Ernie (and the budgie!)

Jennifer

Dear Aunt Dorothy,

Well, here I am at University for the first time, and I must say it isn't what I expected, but I think I'm beginning to settle down and make friends.

There are about a hundred other people in my class, and I think I must be about the youngest, but I don't feel out of place. I've made good friends with my tutor already; I write essays for him every week, and he's always very kind to me when we meet to talk about my work.

There are all kinds of different people in the university, from the very friendly to the very hostile. But I've met a girl called Sally who's really wonderful. She isn't in my faculty, though. She's doing medicine, but we meet every day for lunch, and we sit talking about life for hours.

My flat is very small, but it's warm and comfortable. It's also very close to the university, so it only takes me a few minutes to walk there, and I can get a bus right to the door if it's raining.

Well, I really must go now because Sally and I are off to lunch. I promise I'll write again as soon as I have a moment.

Love to all the family,

Rachel

1.8 TEXT BASED ON A CONVERSATION

Read the following letter. Then, working in groups of two or three, write a similar letter based on the conversation below.

Dear Mother and Father,

This is just a short note to let you know that Pamela and I are both very well, and we hope you are, too. Unfortunately, I've got some rather bad news. I've had a slight accident on my motorbike. There's no need to worry – absolutely nothing to worry about at all. Nobody was hurt, and it wasn't even my fault.

Anyway, here's how it happened. We were on our way to visit Joe and Rosie at the seaside. It was Pamela's turn to drive and, as you know, she's very careful, but suddenly a car pulled out from a side-road without looking, and the bike skidded as Pamela braked. The road was a bit wet, you see. We hit the car in the middle of the road, and we were both thrown off.

Luckily, we weren't really hurt at all. The driver of the car was very angry, but we were absolutely furious, and we started yelling at him. In the end, he backed down and admitted that it had been his fault entirely. There were several witnesses anyway, so he couldn't really have denied it.

After quite a bit more discussion, and thanks to the intervention of one of the witnesses, we managed to persuade the driver to sign a statement admitting full responsibility. I don't know why he did it; I know I would never sign anything like that without asking a lawyer, but I suppose he felt guilty, and he realised he was very lucky it hadn't been worse.

Anyway, as I say, there's nothing to worry about, because we are both perfectly fit and well. We'll probably come and see you towards the end of the month. We'll have to come by train because the bike's going to be in the garage for some time!

Love to the rest of the family,

J: Look out!!

K: Oh, hell! What a mess!

J: But didn't you see the kerb, you bloody idiot?

K: No, of course, I didn't see the kerb. If I'd seen it, I wouldn't have run into it, would I?

J: All right, don't start shouting at *me*. You're the one who's just smashed my car up.

K: Look, let's take it easy for a moment, shall we? Have you got a fag?

J: Here.

K: Thanks. I suppose we'd better go and see what the damage is.

J: I just can't understand why you had to drive up onto the kerb at fifty miles an hour on a perfectly straight road.

K: Look. I'm very sorry about it, and I'll pay for all the damage and all that, but it won't help if you're going to start nagging at me. It isn't a perfectly straight road, for a start. It's a winding country lane, and you may have noticed that it's almost midnight, and there's practically no lighting. So visibility isn't what you'd call optimum.

J: All right. Calm down. I'm just upset about my car. That's all.

K: Well, you're not the only one that's upset, if that's any consolation. Anyway, let's go and have a look, eh?

J: Can we move it?

K: I think so. The wheels are all right. We've just got to try and pull this front wing away from the wheel. Can you give me a hand?

J: Well, I don't think I should. Remember my back's a bit funny these days.

K: Honestly, you are the limit. Fine help you are in a crisis! Well, in that case you'd better try and stop another car because I can't do it by myself.

J: Another car at this time of night? You'll be lucky!

Informal letters

K: Well, you'd better go and try to find a phone, then. That is, if you think your back will stand lifting the receiver.

J: O.K., there's no need to be sarcastic. I'm off.

K: And while you're there, you'd better ring Carol and say that we might be a bit late. Be as quick as you can. Now, I wonder if I can pull this away on my own. Oh, hell. Well, that's that. At least it's not touching the wheel now.

(Ten minutes later)

K: Ah, you're back. Well, off we go!

J: Wait a minute! Where's the wing?

K: On the back seat. I'm afraid it fell off while I was trying to straighten it.

J: Oh, hell! Well, I suppose we can at least get on our way.

K: That's the spirit! You'll see. Tomorrow you'll have forgotten all about it.

1.9 TEXT BASED ON VISUAL INFORMATION

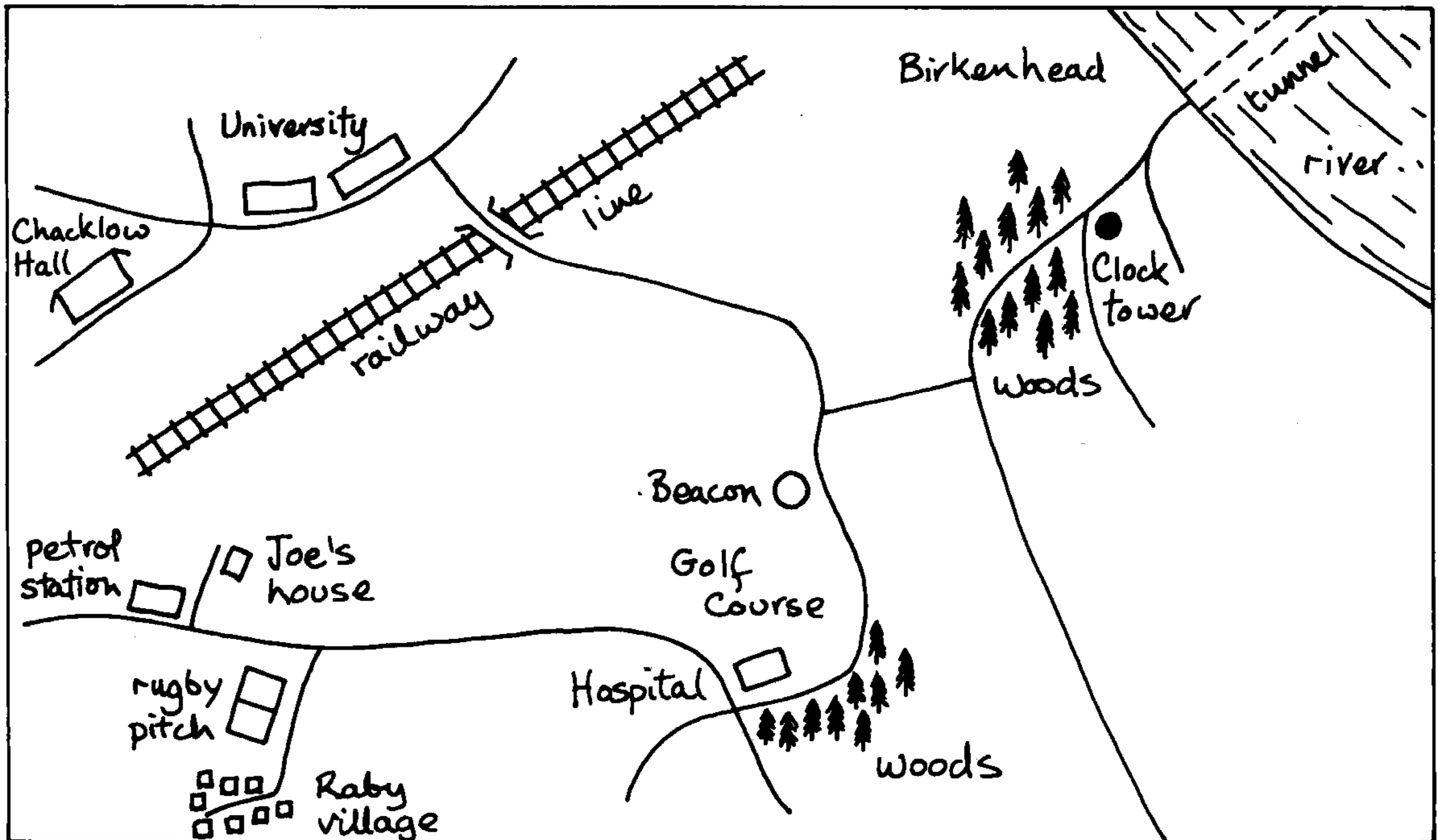
Look at the letter and the map that goes with it. Together they explain how to get to Joe's house. The end of the letter is missing. Working in groups of two or three, complete the letter, giving Tim as many helpful details as possible. Then write a letter explaining how to get from Raby Village to Chacklow Hall.

Dear Tim,

I'm very pleased to hear that you have finally decided to come here for Christmas. I think I'd better explain the route to you in some detail because it isn't easy unless you've done it before. I suppose you'll be able to find your way to the Birkenhead end of the tunnel; that bit's straightforward.

Now, when you come out of the tunnel, the road divides into two. The left fork goes down to the docks. You should take the right fork unless, of course, you feel like going to have a look at the ships! About a hundred yards further on you'll pass a picturesque old clock tower on the left. Immediately after that take the turning on the right, or otherwise you'll be on your way to the river again. The road passes through a wood and gradually bends to the left.

At the end of the wood you'll see a long straight road in front of you. That's where you have to turn right. Follow the road up to the T-junction at the top, and turn left along Mount Road. This is the main road that will take you all the way to Clatterbridge. Follow this road past the beacon on the right and



1.10 IDEAS FOR LETTERS

Choose one of the following topics, or any other topic that interests you, and write a letter to a friend or close relative. Begin and end the letter in a way suitable to the person you are writing to.

- a) An English friend wants to learn your language (or another foreign language). Write a letter detailing your experience in language learning, and explain what you think is the best way to go about it.
- b) A letter about an unusual party, visit or trip. (Compare 1.2.)
- c) A letter about a new job or a new course of studies. (Compare 1.3 and 1.7.)
- d) A letter to someone who wants to do something unusual or socially unacceptable. (Compare 1.4.)
- e) A letter explaining why you and your family or friend(s) cannot accept an invitation. (Compare 1.6.)
- f) A letter explaining an unexpected absence, or something else unexpected.
- g) A letter about an accident, but not necessarily a traffic accident. (Compare 1.8.)
- h) A letter about an argument that you have had.

2 Formal letters I

2.1 PUNCTUATION

Notice the use of the apostrophe (') in the following expressions:

It's mine. You're wrong. He can't come. We'd better wait.
Mary's sister. The children's toys. All the students' names.

Now working in groups of two or three, put in an apostrophe where one is necessary in the following sentences:

- 1 I think its an elephant, but its so far away I cant see its trunk.
- 2 Johns brothers wife went to the grocers for us.
- 3 The womens changing room is opposite the mens.
- 4 The Smiths provided the food, and the Jacksons organised the transport.
- 5 Two wrongs dont make a right.
- 6 This car cant be my parents because theirs is quite old.

Now, working individually, put in an apostrophe where one is necessary in the following sentences:

- 7 Peter asked Jennys father for all the customers addresses.
- 8 The girls entrance used to be separate from the boys; now theres only one entrance for everybody.
- 9 She wont go to the dentists because its too late.
- 10 Whats the sense in saying its Jacks?
- 11 My skis are new; hers are my mothers old ones..
- 12 Its exact translation is somewhat difficult, isnt it?

