

## Common errors in the writing exam

If possible, try to finish the writing part of the Cambridge exam five minutes early, so that you have time to check your essay for the following common mistakes:

### 1. Singular and plural forms

Singular	Plural	Comments
news	(no plural)	If you need to talk about “one news”, you need to say “one news item”
person	people	The important thing here, is that the verb must agree with the subject: “people live” not “people lives”.  Especially for Spanish people this is difficult, because “la gente” is singular.
this... that...	these... those....	Make sure that the pronoun (this, etc.) agrees with the noun (singular / plural).  For more information, see <a href="https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/pronouns/that-these-and-those">https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/pronouns/that-these-and-those</a>
<b>red car</b> <b>car ferry</b>	<b>red cars</b> <b>car ferries</b> <b>(Not: cars ferries)</b>	Adjectives and (most) nouns being used as adjectives <b>NEVER</b> take the plural form (never add an “s”) with a plural noun.  <b>Note:</b> There are small number or nouns which use the plural form, when being used as an adjective (eg. clothes shop), but if you are not 100% sure that the noun should be plural, leave it in the singular form.

### 2. Lists

In English, we rarely use “...” to indicate that there are more things in the lists which we haven’t mentioned. Instead we use:

- and so on
- etc.

### 3. Word Order

Remember that in English sentences, the standard word order is:

**Subject / Verb / Object**

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For example: Young people / like / these programmes.  
**NOT:** These programmes like young people.

And remember, that nearly all English sentences must have a subject:

It is possible that we will go there later **CORRECT**  
Is possible that we will go there later **INCORRECT** (the subject "it" is missing)

### 4. Definite and indefinite articles before a noun

Don't use "the / a / an " before a noun if:

- the noun is an abstract noun (something you can't touch, for example: fear, hunger, love, winter, society.
- the noun is a proper noun (name of a person or place), unless it is the name of a country and the country name contains the word: Kingdom, State(s), or Republic.
- you are talking about something in general

e.g. "Oranges are healthy for you", not "The oranges are healthy for you"  
"Tolerance is important in society", not  
"The tolerance is important in the society"

### 5. Spelling

a) Check you haven't automatically used the spelling of your mother tongue.

- opinion, not opini3n

b) don't use the "grocer's apostrophe" - in other words don't put an apostrophe before the "s" in a plural:

- PCs, not PC's
- pdfs, not pdf's
- teachers, not teacher's
- Beds (a chain of shops in Spain), **NOT** Bed's (which is how they call themselves!)



The apostrophe is **only** used to indicate a missing letter or letters: don't, can't and to indicate possession: the man's house, the dog's food.