E8 Writing Test Specifications Version 01
Otmar Gassner, Claudia Mewald & Guenther Sigott

1. Purpose of the test

The purpose of the writing test is to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in test takers' writing competence. This feedback is of interest to the test takers themselves, their parents, teachers and school principals.

2. Description of test takers

The test takers are Austrian pupils in General Secondary School [*Allgemeinbildende Pflichtschule (APS)*] and Academic Secondary School [*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule (AHS)*] towards the end of grade 8 (8. Schulstufe). Pupils from all three ability groups in APS will be tested. The majority of test takers will be aged 14.

3. Test level

The difficulty level of the test is supposed to encompass levels A2 to B1 in the *Common European Framework of Reference.*

4. Test Construct

Since the purpose of the test is diagnosis, the most significant competences needed for writing have to be identified for assessment purposes. This is first and foremost the communicative competence demonstrated in an appropriate response to the task. Secondly, it is the ability to produce fluent text by using adequate devices to create coherence and cohesion on paragraph and text level. Thirdly, a good knowledge of a range of grammatical structures and the ability to use them accurately, and fourthly, the choice of vocabulary that is relevant to the content, accurate and has a certain range.

The model of writing discourse which is to be used to construct items is specified in Table 1. It lists a number of writing purposes and links these with text types and descriptors from the *Bildungsstandards Fremdsprachen, Oktober 2005*.

The test is designed to elicit language samples that allow the candidates to be assessed in four areas: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, grammar, and vocabulary. An analytic rating scale is used by trained assessors. Generally all samples are double-rated to ensure reliability. Differences in rater severity will be adjusted for in the process of multi-faceted Rasch analysis.

Model of writing discourse

Dominant Intention/ Purpose	Primary Audience	Writing Activity/ Text Types	Deskriptoren aus *Bildungsstandards FS Englisch Sept. Version 05*	Descriptors from the CEF
To convey emotions, feelings	Self Others	- Personal story - Personal diary - Personal letter - Postcard	- Kann Erfahrungsberichte schreiben, in denen Gefühle und Reaktionen in einem einfachen, zusammenhängenden Text wiedergegeben werden. - Kann eine Geschichte erzählen. - Kann Karten, persönliche Briefe und E-Mails schreiben und darin auch über Erfahrungen, Gefühle, Ereignisse berichten.	- *Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text. – B1* - *Can write personal letters describing experiences, feelings and events in some detail. – B1* - *Can narrate a story. – B1* - *Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences. – A2* - *Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point he/she feels to be important. – B1*
To inform	Others	- Narrative report - Fill in a form - Give directions - Simple technical description	- Kann Karten, persönliche Briefe und E-Mails schreiben und darin auch über Erfahrungen, Gefühle, Ereignisse berichten. - Kann kurze, einfache Notizen und Mitteilungen schreiben, die sich auf unmittelbare Bedürfnisse beziehen. - Kann kurze, einfache fiktive Biographien und einfache Gedichte über Menschen schreiben.	- *Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences. – A2* - *Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need. – A2* - *Can write short, simple imaginary biographies and simple poems about people. A2*

Dominant Intention/ Purpose	Primary Audience	Writing Activity/ Text Types	Deskriptoren aus *Bildungsstandards FS Englisch Sept. Version 05*	Descriptors from the CEF
To convince, persuade	Others	- Statement of personal views, opinions - Letter of application - Letter of advice	- Kann in Form verbundener Sätze etwas über alltägliche Aspekte des eigenen Umfelds schreiben, wie z.B. über Familie, andere Menschen, Orte, Lebensumstände. - Kann kurze, einfache Notizen und Mitteilungen schreiben, die sich auf unmittelbare Bedürfnisse beziehen.	- *Can write about everyday aspects of his/her environment, e.g. people, places, a job or study experience in linked sentences. – A2* - *Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need. – A2*
To entertain, delight, please	Others	- Given an ending – create a story - Create an ending - Use a visual impulse to create a story	- Kann eine Geschichte erzählen. - Kann kurze, einfache fiktive Biographien und einfache Gedichte über Menschen schreiben. - Kann einfache Texte zu Bildimpulsen, Satzanfängen und Schlüsselwörtern (key words) schreiben.	- *Can narrate a story. – B1* - *Can write short, simple imaginary biographies and simple poems about people. – B1* - *Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text. Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined. Can narrate a story. – B1*
To keep in touch	Others	- Postcards - Letters - E-Mails	- Kann Karten, persönliche Briefe und E-Mails schreiben und darin auch über Erfahrungen, Gefühle, Ereignisse berichten. - Kann kurze, einfache Notizen und Mitteilungen schreiben, die sich auf unmittelbare Bedürfnisse beziehen.	- *Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences. – A2* - *Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point he/she feels to be important. – B1* - *Can write personal letters describing experiences, feelings and events in some detail. – B1* - *Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need. – A2*

Table 1: Cf. Vähäpässi, 1982. Quoted in S.C. Weigle. *Assessing Writing*, Cambridge University Press 2002, p.8-9.

5. Structure of the test

The test will consist of 2 sections. Section 1 consists of a short writing task with an expected response of 40 to 60 words. Section 2 consists of a long writing task with an expected response of 120 to 150 words. The two tasks will be assessed separately on the basis of the four dimensions of the writing scale.

6. Time allocation

Total testing time available: 45 minutes.

Time for administration at the beginning (handing out test booklets): 5 minutes

Time for administration at the end (collecting test booklets): 5 minutes

Working time: 35 minutes. (short task ~10 minutes; long task ~20; revision ~5).

7. Item formats

The candidates' scripts will be handwritten on two separate A4 sheets. The writing task is guided by prompts that ensure that the candidates produce enough language that makes reliable and valid assessment possible.
The prompts may contain black and white pictures or drawings. They need to be appropriate for the age and at a language level slightly below the tested level. Input texts should be authentic, if at all possible, and as long as necessary to contextualise the task. Ideally, they should not be longer than 50 words.
Prompts are developed to be free of stereotypes. They offer the opportunity to write from experience, but are designed not to intrude on the student's personal feelings.

8. Rubrics

All rubrics are in English. However, they must be formulated in language that is well under the candidate's expected level and therefore easily understandable for all test takers. Test takers must not be put at a disadvantage because they have difficulty understanding the rubrics.
Rubrics need to indicate the reason for writing, the audience and the required text-type. The required length of the text will be indicated in number of words. All expected content points are to be clearly mentioned in the prompts

9. Writing Rating Scale

The following pages 5 – 10 include the four-dimensions of the analytic rating scale for writing and more detailed scales for each of the four dimensions, where the links to the *Bildungsstandards Version Oktober 2005* and the *Common European Framework* (2001) are made more visible.

Writing Rating Scale

	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion	Grammar	Vocabulary
7	- complete task achievement - meets text type requirements	- cohesive on both sentence and paragraph level - clear, coherent text	- good range of structures - few inaccuracies	- good range of vocabulary - mostly relevant to topic - generally accurate with some incorrect words
6				
5	- good task achievement - few inconsistencies in text type requirements	- good sentence level cohesion - some paragraph level coherence and cohesion	- generally sufficient range of structures - occasional inaccuracies	- sufficient range of vocabulary, communicating clear ideas - generally relevant to topic - occasionally inaccurate
4				
3	- sufficient task achievement - some inconsistencies in text type requirements	- some simple sentence level cohesion - frequent lack of paragraph level coherence and cohesion	- limited range of simple structures - frequently inaccurate	- limited range of vocabulary, communicating clear ideas - occasionally relevant to topic - frequently inaccurate vocabulary
2				
1	- some task achievement - does not meet text type requirements	- extremely limited cohesion on sentence and paragraph level - text not coherent	- extremely limited range of simple structures - mostly inaccurate	- extremely limited range of vocabulary, communicating few clear ideas - mostly inaccurate vocabulary - mostly irrelevant to topic with several chunks lifted from prompt
0	no task achievement	no assessable language	no assessable language	no assessable language

Task achievement

	Scales	Extended scales
7	complete task achievement meets text type requirements	complete task achievement with nearly all content points mentioned and elaborated meets text type requirements, word limit met
6		
5	good task achievement few inconsistencies in text type requirements	good task achievement with nearly all content points mentioned and some elaborated few inconsistencies in text type requirements, word limit met
4		
3	sufficient task achievement some inconsistencies in text type requirements	sufficient task achievement with most content points mentioned and a few elaborated some inconsistencies in text type requirements, word limit not met
2		
1	some task achievement does not meet text type requirements	some task achievement with some content points mentioned does not meet text type requirements, word limit not met
0	no task achievement	

Coherence and Cohesion

	Scales	Extended scales	CEF
7	- cohesive on both sentence and paragraph level - clear, coherent text	- cohesive on both sentence and paragraph level using a limited number of cohesive devices - clear, coherent text with occasional 'jumpiness'	*Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution. (B2)*
6			
5	- good sentence level cohesion - some paragraph level coherence and cohesion	- good sentence level cohesion as linear sequence on a simple level - some paragraph level coherence and cohesion	*Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.* (B1)
4			*Can use the most frequently occurring connectors to link simple sentences in order to tell a story or describe something as a simple list of points. (A2+)*
3	- some simple sentence level cohesion - frequent lack of paragraph level coherence and cohesion	- some simple sentence level cohesion using *simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'* - frequent lack of paragraph level coherence and cohesion	*Can link groups of words with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'. (A2)*
2			
1	- extremely limited cohesion on sentence and paragraph level - text not coherent	- Basic linear connectors ('and', 'then') on word or word group level - text not coherent	*Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like 'and' or 'then'. (A1)*
0	no assessable language		

Grammar

	Scales	Extended scales	CEF
7	- good range of structures - few inaccuracies	- good range of structures for most communicative needs - few inaccuracies, relatively high degree of grammatical control	*Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding. (B2)*
6			*Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express. (B1+)*
• **5**	- generally sufficient range of structures for familiar contexts - occasional inaccuracies mostly not causing misunderstanding	- generally sufficient range of structures for familiar contexts, mostly uses a learnt repertoire for predictable situations - occasional inaccuracies can disrupt communication but message is clear, L1 influence	*Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.* (B1)
4			
3	- limited range of simple structures - frequently inaccurate but generally without causing breakdown	- limited range of simple structures - frequently inaccurate with basic mistakes, e.g. tenses or verb-noun agreement but generally without causing breakdown, message usually clear	*Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes – for example tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is usually clear what he/she is trying to say. (A2)*
2			
1	- extremely limited range of structures - mostly inaccurate	- extremely limited range of simple structures or patterns within a learnt repertoire - frequently causing breakdown of communication	*Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learnt repertoire. (A1)*
0	no assessable language		

Vocabulary

	Scales	Extended scales	CEF
7	- good range of vocabulary - mostly relevant to topic - generally accurate with some incorrect words	- good range of vocabulary dealing with most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid repetition. - mostly relevant to topic - generally accurate with some incorrect words	*Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution. (Range - B2) Lexical accuracy is generally high, though some confusion and incorrect word choice does occur without hindering communication. (Control - B2)*
6			
5	- sufficient range of vocabulary, communicating clear ideas - generally relevant to topic - occasionally inaccurate	- sufficient range of vocabulary dealing with familiar topics and everyday life, communicating clear ideas - generally relevant to topic - occasionally inaccurate; major errors occur when expressing more complex ideas or unfamiliar topics	*Has a sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his/her everyday life such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events. (Range - B1) Shows good control of elementary vocabulary but major errors still occur when expressing more complex thoughts or handling unfamiliar topics and situations. (Control - B1)*
4			*Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics. (Range - A2+)*
3	- limited range of vocabulary, communicating clear ideas - occasionally relevant to topic	- limited range of vocabulary dealing with concrete everyday needs or familiar topics, communicating clear ideas - occasionally relevant to topic with several chunks lifted from prompt	*Has a sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs. Has a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs. (Range - A2) Can control a narrow repertoire dealing with concrete everyday needs. (Control - A2)*

	- frequently inaccurate vocabulary	- frequently inaccurate vocabulary, controlling a narrow repertoire dealing with concrete everyday needs	
2			
1	- extremely limited range of vocabulary, communicating few clear ideas - mostly inaccurate vocabulary - mostly irrelevant to topic with several chunks lifted from prompt	- extremely limited range of vocabulary communicating few clear ideas - mostly inaccurate vocabulary frequently causing breakdown of communication - mostly irrelevant to topic with several chunks lifted from prompt	*Has a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases related to particular concrete situations. Range - (A1)*
0	no assessable language		

10. Prompts and performance samples

The task prototypes listed below are from *Aufgabenbeispiele I* (BMBWK, 2005 and 2006). It is important that the tasks are structured in a way that task achievement can be measured. The expected length of the scripts, however, needs to be adapted according to point 5 in the specifications.

10.1. Long Task

10.1.1.   Based on Task 017 in Aufgabenbeispiele I, 110-111

You will have 20 minutes to do this task.
Read the instructions carefully and then write your text on the separate sheet. Your letter should be 120 to 150 words long.

Read this letter from Aki, a 14-year-old girl in Johannesburg, South Africa, to you. Then write a letter to Aki in which you try to answer all her questions.

Dear ....,

My name is Aki Thokele and I live in Johannesburg in the Republic of South Africa. We are doing a project about Europe in our school, and I have decided to find out information about Austria. Maybe you can help me with my work?

These are my questions:
- *Is it really true that there is so much snow in Austria?*
- *Does everybody ski in Austria?*
- *What about school?*
- *What subjects do you like best?*
- *Which foreign languages do you learn?*
- *Are your holidays long enough?*
- *Tell me about your hobbies and interests – what do teens enjoy doing in your country?*

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Aki

10.2. Short Task

10.2.1   Based on Task 035 in Aufgabenbeispiele I, 116-117

You will have 10 minutes to do this task.
Read the instructions carefully and then write your text on the separate sheet. Your short letter or e-mail should be 40 to 60 words long.

Your American aunt has sent you a birthday present. Write a short letter or an e-mail to say thank you.
Tell your aunt you really liked your present and why it is useful for you. You can also ask her if you could visit her in your summer vacation.

You could start your letter like this:

Dear Aunt Lizzy,