ECPE Writing Notes

Introducing the phenomenon to be discussed
Nowadays, the... constitutes a prodigious (τεραστιο) and controversial subject and without doubt, a sign of our times.

Nowadays, one of the most serious and predominant problems is... . This appalling (τρομερο, φρικτο), social phenomenon is growing extremely, thus posing a threat on society. This begs the question; Is this situation reversible? Can we do something to help?

Nowadays, we live in a complex and highly demanding society. The rat race which we daily face is continuously minimizing our free time, making it difficult for us to find time ...

More and more families are choosing to have only one child. / The trend nowadays is towards having smaller families.

Over the past ten years or so the media have frequently carried reports of ... / Recent research indicates that the number of teenagers who smoke is increasing. / Hardly a week goes by without another report of ................ appearing in the media.

This raises the issue of whether .................

Although most people would generally agree that ............... few would deny that .................

Stating your opinion
To my mind / It is my firm belief that / As far as I am concerned / As far as I know / it is my concern that / As I see it, / It seems to me that / I would also say that / I am convinced that / I am inclined to believe that / There is no doubt in my mind that / I am of the conviction that / To the best of my knowledge

Advantages / Disadvantages
One advantage of / A further advantage of / The main advantage of / the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages / One of the drawbacks of .... is .... /However, one of the benefits is that ...

Changing topic
As regards the causes for this, ... / Concerning the causes for this, .... / As for the causes, ... / Regarding / with respect/regard/reference to / Concerning

Presenting arguments
One justification often given for ... is that ... / Advocates/Proponents would claim that ... / Those who object to ... often argue that ... / Another objection is that ... / However, it should not be forgotten that ... / ... are opposed to ... on the grounds that ... / From the point of view of ... /

... brings detrimental repercussions / Their appearance can be attributed to a diversity of factors, such as ...

According to / Owing to the fact that / Due to the fact that / Seeing that / On the grounds that / In view of /

People often claim that / Some people feel that / Proponents of this view argue that / Opponents of this view argue that / It is popularly believed that

Despite the fact that / In spite of the fact that / However / Nevertheless / Nonetheless / Although / On the other hand
Describing causes
One factor which has led to ... is ... / One of the factors which has brought this about is ... / The problem often stems from ... / The situation has been exacerbated by ... / ... has only made the situation worse / One consequence of ... is ... /
Thus / Therefore / As a consequence / As a result /

Proposing steps and measures
As regards the most appropriate response to this situation, one suggestion would be to ... / The first step to be taken would be to ... / To alleviate the situation people should ... / In addition they ought to ... / To begin to tackle this situation society/individuals/the government need/s to ... / ... would certainly ameliorate the situation / This can only be dealt with if ... / To overcome this problem, ... / Were the government to ..., the situation would doubtless improve / Individuals can do a great deal to ... / The burden of responsibility lies in the hands of ... / It is vitally important that / Legislation should be introduced to control ... / It would be a grave error if we ...

Concluding
All in all it seems to me that ... / The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that ... / On balance, I tend to believe that ... / The world would surely be a better place to live in if ... / If people stopped ....ing, we would have/ we could look forward to a ... / The prospects for the future will be bleak/grim unless ... /
All things considered / Considering all the above / To sum up / On the whole / In conclusion / By and large / In general / In closing /

Therefore, it is essential / imperative that we take the necessary measures to reverse the situation.

To recapitulate, it is indispensable to reiterate that each person / the government should do everything possible in order to...

I hope that the situation will be generally enhanced and that...

To list points
First of all / In the first place / First and foremost / Secondly / What is more / Furthermore / Moreover / In addition

Giving examples
for instance / for example /

Clarifying
To put it another way / That is to say / In other words / In the same way /

More expressions
with the intention of / with the purpose of /

obviously / it is a fact that / as a matter of fact /

In the event of / Provided that / up to a point
USEFUL VOCABULARY

Commendable – αξιαίπενο / Advisable / Appropriate / Expedient measures – χρήσιμα, κατάλληλα / Opportune / Suggestive / Beneficial / Vantage point – πλεονεκτική θέση / Espouse policy, idea - ασπάζομαι / advisable / crucial / to be vital / to be of pivotal importance / all-dominant / advantageous / patently obvious = glaringly obvious - ολοφάνερο / to be of substantial prominence / of paramount importance / instrumental in doing sth – παίζω σημαντικό ρόλο σε / cause irreparable harm to / is conducive to learning - ευνοώ / ameliorate - βελτιώνω / susceptible to / vulnerable to / the determining factor of ... is ... / the ramifications (επιπλοκές) of this disparity (ανομοιότητα) entail (συνεπάγομαι)... /

Asset / benefit

To advocate sth - υποστηρίζω / To further - προωθώ / To countenance sth - επικροτώ / to support in sth / to abet = to aid / to endorse – εγκρίνω (plans, proposal) / to recommend/comment on / to fortify / to encourage / Adopt a proposal / to take rigorous steps / to comply with sth / To be an advantage over sth / corroborate a belief, story, fact - επιθεώρησα / to be of great value / to submit a proposal / to embolden sb to do sth - ενθαρρύνώ / to retain the unequivocal (σαφή, κατηγορηματικό) notion that / to attach importance to sth / to heed sb's advice – λαμβάνω υπ’ όψιν, ακούω προσεκτικά / to ascribe importance to sth - οποδίδω / It would be sensible to implement my suggestions / upon my recommendation / to facilitate / it may entail (συνεπάγομαι) a constituent (σημαντικό) factor in doing sth / aggravate the situation / accommodate our needs

Using more advanced vocabulary

"solve the problem"

a crisis in education which must be addressed

something that must be tackled / be dealt with

a challenge which must be met

something must be done to restore law and order in the inner cities

Useful Advanced Essay Structures

- **Participle phrases and gerunds up front:**
  "Burning plastics produces dioxins."
  "Reducing the retirement age would create significant difficulties for pension funds."
  "Having been bullied at school, I know how psychologically damaging this can be."
  "Having been released from prison, many people subsequently reoffend."

- **Conditionals with inversions instead of "If.."**
  "Were the government to .......... , we would ............."
  "Had television not been invented, economic growth would have been slower."
  "Had the police implemented the law more strictly, fewer people would now be disabled."

- **Cleft sentences**
  "What ecologists object to is .........."
  "What many people would like to see is ................."
  "It is the ............... that I object to."
• **Inversions**
  "Not only are landfill sites unsightly but they are also a source of pollution"
  "Rarely do we see our political leaders riding bikes."

• **Passives**
  "It is often forgotten that ..................."
  "............... is considered to be ............."
  "....... has been attributed to ......."
  ".......has been linked with ........."
  "The conclusion to be drawn is that ............"

• **The advanced use of 'so'**
  This is so grave an issue that .......

---

**Essay Writing Advice (for ECPE and C2 exams)**

Here we tell you how to write an essay that will get good marks in an English language (EFL/ESL) exam such as the Michigan ECPE. The advice would be the same for the essays that candidates have to write in other EFL/ESL exams such as the IELTS, TOEFL and Cambridge CPE exams.

First, let's have a look at some actual ECPE exam writing tasks so that we can see the different types of essay that we might have to write.

**1994**

Topic 1: In most families there is one family member who doesn't follow society's rules and often embarrasses the rest of the family by doing or saying something unusual or funny. Describe one of your relatives who is like this. Include several examples of this person's behaviour.

Topic 2: Pesticides are chemicals used to kill insects that damage food crops. Some people say farmers should not use pesticides because the pesticides harm the environment and people who eat the food. Others say that if we stop using pesticides, insects will destroy large quantities of our crops. Do you think farmers should stop using pesticides? Explain the reasons for your opinion.

**1995**

Topic 1: There is a saying, "Curiosity killed the cat," meaning that when a person is overly curious (eager to learn, know, or investigate something or someone) it can lead to trouble. Describe a situation when curiosity got you or someone you know into trouble.

Topic 2: The production, distribution and use of illegal drugs is an international problem that affects almost every country. What actions should be taken to reduce the production, distribution or use of illegal drugs around the world? Discuss.

**1996**

Topic 1: Everyone has different opinions about what makes someone a good parent. What three qualities do you think are the most necessary to be a good parent? Why are these qualities important? Discuss, giving examples.

Topic 2: Unemployment is a problem facing many countries today. Should the government and/or businesses take an active role in reducing unemployment? Discuss, providing reasons.
2002

Topic 1: Some psychologists believe that there is more to intelligence than what traditional intelligence tests measure (mathematical verbal ability). They say there are many kinds of intelligence and many ways to be smart. Besides mathematical and linguistic intelligence, in what other ways do you think people are smart? Be specific in your discussion and provide concrete examples.

Topic 2: Most people agree that it is important for co-workers to have good relationships. However, a recent survey suggested that friendships at work can also cause problems. In what ways can friendships at work be harmful. Discuss, giving specific examples.

2004 (Only one topic provided in the sample from ELI-UM)

The United States government recently passed a law that would punish schools whose students do poorly on national exams. Some people think that schools should not take all the blame. In your opinion, what factors influence students' performance? Discuss, giving specific examples to support your point of view.

2010

Topic 1. Some people believe that body language shows more about people's true feelings than spoken language. Body language includes people's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture. Do you believe we can tell more from body language than from what people say? Be specific and give concrete examples in your response.

Topic 2. Every generation of people is different from the previous one. What is one important way in which your generation is different from your parents' generation? How will this difference affect your country or culture? Give specific details and reasons to support your viewpoint.

Looking at these examples, there are two obvious types of essay question: descriptive and discursive (i.e. presenting arguments and opinions). Some students who have experience of creative writing in their own language may find it easy to write the descriptive essay, but in our experience the majority of students feel more comfortable with the discursive essay, partly because it is usually possible to use a formula and a number of set phrases. Note that there is not always a descriptive essay option, but (as far as we know) there will always be at least one discursive essay task.

Discursive essays

Planning

Planning can seem like a waste of time, but it isn't, especially when time is short and there is no possibility of redrafting the essay. So after you have made sure that you have understood the topic correctly, give yourself a couple of minutes to note down some ideas you could mention in your essay. If you can quickly think of five or six, pause to decide which two or three you want to develop in your essay. Choose ideas that you know you have the vocabulary to discuss. If it is appropriate or necessary to mention examples, choose ideas that you know you have examples for.

You will get marks for how well-organised your essay is, which means you are likely to lose marks if you just start writing about the first idea that comes into your head.

Formula for a discursive essay

Every discursive essay needs an introduction and a main body. Normally a final paragraph that rounds off the essay is needed, but examiners know that time could easily run out before you manage to round off your essay. Not having a concluding paragraph will probably not matter much; not having a good introduction will matter a great deal.

Introduction

Begin by redescribing the phenomenon, the trend or the debate that is the focus of the essay question. In a short ECPE essay this might only need one or two sentences.

In the past, it seemed obvious to many that the only reliable test of intelligence was one which assessed a person's ability to reason, especially the ability to see patterns in words, numbers and symbols. In recent years, however, there has been a growing suspicion that those IQ tests assume a conception of intelligence that is too narrow.
End your introduction either by:

1 briefly stating the point of view you are going to defend.

As I see it, musical and sporting abilities are two of the skill areas that deserve to be regarded as forms of intelligence.

2 stating what you are going to do in the rest of the essay.

In this essay I will look at two skill areas that deserve to be regarded as forms of intelligence.

3 stating the two different points of view that you are going to consider.

Although the vast majority of farmers look upon pesticides as invaluable, some consumers and pressure groups have spoken out against them.

4 stating the question you are going to answer.

This raises the question of whether the benefits of pesticides outweigh their drawbacks.

If the essay question specifically asks about your opinion, it might be better to briefly state this at the end of the introduction, without giving any details or arguments (but it is not absolutely necessary, especially if you don't have a firm opinion).

If you want to look at different points of view before you weigh them up and give your final assessment, it might be better to use techniques three and four above.

**Main body**

This needs two paragraphs, each of which should develop one point.

Depending on the essay task, you might need to describe examples (as in the question about intelligence), discuss different points of view, describe causes, make suggestions, and give reasons for your point of view. Below are examples of paragraphs that do each of these things.

**Describing examples**

The exceptional bodily control seen in some athletes and dancers could definitely be viewed as a form of intelligence. The ability of a ballerina, for instance, to maintain perfect balance and turn her movements into a work of art can only be developed with years of strenuous training. In a sense, ballet has its own language, and it seems reasonable to compare the skill of using this language with the skill of using the verbal language that has been traditionally tested when measuring a person's IQ. Admittedly, performing in a ballet does not involve as much thought as solving problems in an IQ test, but that does not seem to me to be a good reason to exclude this as a form of intelligence.

Another area in which people can show how smart they are is music. ...

**Discussing different points of view**

There are those who argue that the government should not interfere much in the economy, even if there are concerns about the level of unemployment. It is said that the rate of unemployment will fall naturally if there is economic growth, and the best way to guarantee economic growth is to allow the market to develop without government interference. Those with this point of view accept that the government has a responsibility, but they insist that it should not go beyond providing a minimal unemployment benefit to those who are temporarily out of work.

On the other hand, it is often argued that...

**Describing causes and making suggestions**

One of the reasons why some children fail at school is poverty. Students will only make good progress if they do their homework well, but a child from a large and poverty-stricken family who does not have a quiet room at home in which to study will not be able to do her homework well. Furthermore, in poor families the parents sometimes have a very low level of education and may even have a negative opinion about the importance of education. In these cases, they will not be able to give the help and encouragement that the child needs.

As regards the steps that need to be taken to remedy this situation, the first priority should be to...
Giving reasons for your point of view

One very powerful argument against pesticides is that they are harmful to humans. Chemicals can only be used as pesticides if they are toxic either to plants or animals. These are poisons, and it is hardly surprising that chemicals that are poisonous to some forms of plant life, for instance, also have detrimental effects on human health. Eating rice that has been sprayed during storage and transport to prevent it being eaten by insects may not make us ill immediately, but by continually eating sprayed fruit and vegetables it is almost certain that we increase our risks of suffering from cancer.

Another reason for banning pesticides concerns the effect they have on the environment. ...

Final paragraph

Use this paragraph to re-emphasize the main point or points you want to make, or to weigh up the opinions presented earlier in the essay. Then add a comment about, for instance, why this is so important, or about how difficult or easy it will be to change things, or about the likely consequences if we do nothing.

In conclusion, for the sake of both the environment and human health drastic reductions in our use of pesticides must be made. Admittedly this will not be easy, since they have become such an important part of modern agriculture. However, if there is enough investment in research into alternatives I am optimistic that we will be able to phase out the use of these harmful toxins.

Try to avoid simply repeating what you have already said. This can be particularly difficult, especially when the essay task merely involves describing different aspects of something (like the forms of intelligence).

To sum up, it is clear that the ability to do the old-fashioned IQ tests is not the only form of intelligence. Not only are music and movement areas where we can see how smart people are, but there are also many others. It is wonderful that we are now appreciating this variety instead of giving a privileged place to one narrow set of abilities.

Informal or informal English?

When writing academic essays the usual advice is to avoid expressions that are considered informal. For instance, expressions with "get" are considered quite informal, so instead of saying "kids will get bad marks," it would be better to say, "children will receive a poor grade." One good reason for following this advice is that most of the language you have been learning on your proficiency course is formal, and so by choosing a formal register (as we call it) you give yourself more opportunities to show what you have learnt on the course.

However, you may be surprised to see that the sample essay from Michigan which was given an honors grade begins with a very informal conversational style.

OK, so your son got a low score in his IQ tests. Don't be discouraged since this does not mean he is not "intelligent". It simply means they may not have tested his main intelligence. More and more reassuring news is coming from new research. These new studies indicate that there is more to intelligence than the traditional mathematical and linguistic intelligence.

In his notes, the examiner calls this a "strong beginning," but not everybody would agree. (By the way, the rest of that essay didn't use a conversational style.) Our advice is to use more formal and sophisticated language wherever you can because this will give better proof that you have become a proficient user of the kind of academic English that makes up most of the ECPE exam.
Dos and Don'ts

- Do make sure you have understood the task correctly.
- Do ask if you are not sure about the task.
- Do spend a couple of minutes thinking of ideas, choosing the best ones and the order you will discuss them in.
- Do try to have a good introduction. This creates the first impression on the examiner, and first impressions are very important.
- Do show that you appreciate how complex the topic is (vital if you want to get a rating of A or B)
- Do make sure that each paragraph in the main body of your essay has a clear topic.
- Do develop your ideas by giving arguments for the opinions you mention, and/or giving examples, or drawing a contrast, or by acknowledging the opposite point of view (if you have not planned to do that in the following paragraph).
- Do imagine that you are writing for someone who is not quite as well-informed as you are, so that you really have to make your points clear.
- Do try to use a good range of vocabulary. Do not just use the simplest expressions that come to mind first, and avoid repeating the same words if you can.
- Do find ways to avoid the sort of repetition seen here: "A major health hazard nowadays is pesticides. Pesticides are widely used in modern agriculture."
- Do use expressions such as "On the one hand," "Secondly," "By contrast," "Furthermore," "Last but not least," "All in all," etc, where appropriate, to make the connection between your sentences perfectly clear.
- Do vary the length of your sentences. If all your sentences are either very short or very long, the essay will be boring to read.
- Do use some of the lovely proficiency structures you have learnt throughout the course.
- Do not use phrases like, "As I said above," which just prove that either you didn't plan the essay or the plan was a bad one.
- Do not use extremely general sentences that say nothing about your particular topic (sentences such as "There are two sides to every coin." "Everything has its drawbacks." "Nothing is perfect." etc).
- Do try to write sufficiently neatly so that your essay is easy to read. As long as you manage this, it does not matter if certain words and phrases are crossed out.
- Do keep one eye on the clock and leave yourself a minute or so to check your work. We all make mistakes, and if you can correct some of yours, you will save valuable marks.
### 1. Narrative Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introduction</strong></th>
<th>Restate the topic as a general issue that needs to be addressed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Body</strong></td>
<td>§1. Approach the topic as a general issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§2,3. Narrate your personal example. Break it into 2 or 3 paragraphs. Before the main event – After the main event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Discuss the <strong>general</strong> influence of this <strong>specific</strong> event.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Problem Solving Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introduction</strong></th>
<th>Restate the topic as a general issue that needs to be addressed. Mention the problem and tell that solutions do exist.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Body</strong></td>
<td>§1. Analyse the problem: Aspects of the problem and negative consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Version I]</td>
<td>§2,3. Provide the solutions. Break it into 2 or 3 paragraphs. Each paragraph is devoted to one solution. Show how things will be better if you put this solution into practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Body</strong></td>
<td>§1. 1\textsuperscript{st} aspect of the problem and its negative consequences. Possible solutions and its positive results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Version II]</td>
<td>§2. 2\textsuperscript{nd} aspect of the problem and its negative consequences. Possible solutions and its positive results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§3. repeat the same pattern if it is required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Express the confidence that if the solutions are implemented the problem will be solved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. For & Against Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introduction</strong></th>
<th>Restate the topic as a general issue that needs to be addressed. (Do not state your opinion here)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Body</strong></td>
<td>§1. <strong>Negative</strong> aspects of the issue. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§2. <strong>Positive</strong> aspects of the issue. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Repeat the two aspects and express your opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Considering all the above, it is clear that... outweigh the...**
4. Opinion Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Restate the topic as a general issue that needs to be addressed. State your opinion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Body</td>
<td>§1. 1\textsuperscript{st} aspect of the issue. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§2. 2\textsuperscript{nd} aspect of the issue. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Version I: only your opinion]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Body</td>
<td>§1. Your opinion. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Version II: mention the opposing view]</td>
<td>§2. The opposing view. Analyse the opposing view and \textbf{explain why it is wrong}.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Summarise your view. Leave the readers with a thought provoking idea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. “Unique” Essay: tasks that not quite fit any mold
Read the title carefully and \textbf{number} the points that it raises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Restate the topic as a general issue that needs to be addressed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Body</td>
<td>§1. 1\textsuperscript{st} point of the issue. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§2. 2\textsuperscript{nd} point of the issue. Start with a clear topic sentence. Use appropriate linkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§3. repeat the same pattern if it is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Summarise what you have said. Leave the readers with a thought provoking idea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>