

How to write a review? | B2 First (FCE)

- Structure
- Writing Guide
- Model Answers
- Example Topics
- Writing Checklist
- Tips
- Grammar & Vocabulary
- Useful Phrases & Expressions
- Frequently Asked Questions



Reviews in B2 First (FCE) exam are written for a website, a magazine or a newspaper.

You always have to do two things **describe** and **discuss** something, for example, a **film**, a **book**, a **restaurant**, an experience or whatever the task might require you to talk about. Also, you have to make a **recommendation** at the end of your text.

Unlike an essay a review should be written in an informal or neutral register, this means:

- you **CAN** use **phrasal verbs**,
- you **CAN** use **idioms**
- you **CAN** use **contractions**
- you **CAN** be **creative!**

Structure

<p style="text-align: center;">Title Use the name of the film, book or restaurant.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction Identify what you are reviewing (actors, director etc.). Try to catch the reader's attention (ask a narrative question).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1st body paragraph Describe the book, film, restaurant</p>

2nd body paragraph

Comment on the questions you have been asked

Conclusion

Summarize your review with a recommendation

Writing Guide

We will use the example **FCE review topic** below:

You see this announcement in your college English-language magazine.

Book reviews wanted

Have you read a book in which the main character behaved in a surprising way?

Write us a review of the book, explaining what the main character did and why it was surprising. Tell us whether or not you would recommend this book to other people.

The best reviews will be published in the magazine.

Write your **review** (140-190 words)

Step 1: Briefly analyse the given topic...

The first thing you need to do is to underline a **description part** -in other words, just find what needs to be described.

Secondly, find a **discussion part** – in other words, try to find the **specific points** you need to **comment** on in your text.

Finally, find the **target reader** so you know exactly who you are writing for and who is going to read your review.

You see this announcement in your college English-language magazine. (our readers)

Book reviews wanted

Have you read a book in which the main character behaved in a surprising way? *(to describe)*

Write us a review of the book, explaining what the main character did and why it was surprising. *(to comment)*

The best reviews will be published in the magazine.

Now we have all **three elements** we need to write a great review:

You need to describe:

Book in which the main character behaved in a surprising way

You need to answer/discuss:

1. What did the main character do?
2. Why it was surprising?

Who is the target reader: *college English-language magazine.*

We know now that the target readers are **students, teachers** and **probably parents** so the writing style should be neutral or informal.

We don't need to be **too formal** because after all some of the readers are **students**, but we also don't want to be **too informal** as some of the readers are teachers and parents.

Now we can start [building our structure](#) and writing a review.

Step 2: Title

The review should start with the title, and there are few simple ways to write it:

- imagine you're reviewing a **book** you can write: **[Title] by [Author]**
- if you were reviewing a **restaurant** you could write: **[name of the restaurant] – a review**

Title (book): Dark Souls by Stephen King (by)

Title (restaurant): Taco Bell in London – a review (a review)

We will use **this title** in our **guide**:

TITLE: Time Machine by Adam Smith

Tip: Nothing prevents you from writing something **more unique** but it has to point to what you are going to review.

Step 3: Introduction



Use the introduction to **identify the thing** you are going to be reviewing and **provide details** like the genre (i.e. a science fiction novel, a horror movie) or location (if it's a restaurant).

The **other function** of your introduction is to **engage the reader**. You can do it by asking **a question**.

Make your introduction at least **2 sentences** long.

INTRODUCTION: What would you do if you could travel back in time? Most people would probably meet their great-great-grandparents or watch how the amazing pyramids in Giza were built, but Tom Lee, the main character of the novel Time Machine by Adam Smith finds himself in a completely unexpected situation and he has to make a very difficult decision that will change history as we know it.

– question

– details about the book and main character

Step 4: The body paragraphs (main content)

The **body paragraphs** are the main parts of your review so they should be the **longest** and carry **most of the information**. Also, here you **describe the points** you've found in *(Step 1)*

You need to answer/discuss:

1. What did the main character do?
2. Why it was surprising?

You can use **idioms**, and **phrasal verbs** – neutral/informal language is appropriate for your target reader – **students and teachers**.

See the example below, in which we **dedicated one paragraph to one point**.

[Who is the main character and what did he do? – describe]

Tom, a teacher in a little town in Rotherham, finds a mysterious time portal in the back of a ragged diner which takes him back to the year 1935. He soon realises that every time he goes through the portal he gets to the exact same point in the past. Eventually, he makes the unexpected decision to

stop Michael James Newton from brutally killing President John F. Kennedy on 22.11.1963.

[Why it was surprising? – comment]

It seems to me that Tom could choose many other and more personal things to do, but he decides to try and change history to a degree that he cannot predict. In my opinion, that came definitely unexpected and if I were in his position I probably wouldn't even consider a task this far-reaching.

– own opinion

– descriptive/interesting vocabulary

– relevant details about the main character and book

TIP: What if you don't read books?



Don't waste your time looking for a **real book** to match your review. **Invent one**, it doesn't have to be real.

And yes that may sound difficult: you have to invent a book and then write a review about your invented book.

So instead take a **tv series** you like, take a **film** you like and transform them into books. That's simple!

Step 5: Conclusion / Recommendations

Finally, we need to make a **recommendation** because after all, that's the **only reason** why anyone would read a review they want to know what the reviewer thinks about the **book, film or restaurant**.

A good final paragraph of a review does exactly **two things**

- it includes a recommendation
- and a final sentence to round off the review

CONCLUSION: I definitely recommend "Time Machine" to everyone who has already read some of Adam Smith's novels as well as to those who like stories

with twists and turns around every corner plus you get some modern history on top of that. For me, it was absolutely worth reading and I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

See full review...

Full Review

Time Machine by Adam Smith

What would you do if you could travel back in time? Most people would probably meet their great-great-grandparents or watch how the amazing pyramids in Giza were built, but Tom Lee, the main character of the novel Time Machine by Adam Smith finds himself in a completely unexpected situation and he has to make a very difficult decision that will change history as we know it.

Tom, a teacher in a little town in Rotherham, finds a mysterious time portal in the back of a ragged diner which takes him back to the year 1935. He soon realises that every time he goes through the portal he gets to the exact same point in the past. Eventually, he makes the unexpected decision to stop Michael James Newton from brutally killing President John F. Kennedy on 22.11.1963.

It seems to me that Tom could choose many other and more personal things to do, but he decides to try and change history to a degree that he cannot predict. In my opinion, that came definitely unexpected and if I were in his position I probably wouldn't even consider a task this far-reaching.

I definitely recommend "Time Machine" to everyone who has already read some of Adam Smith's novels as well as to those who like stories with twists and turns around every corner plus you get some modern history on top of that. For me, it was absolutely worth reading and I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

Model Answers

Model Answer 1

Topic

You have seen this notice in your school library:

REVIEWS NEEDED

We want to buy some new books for the library. Have you read a good book in English recently?

Write us a review of a book you enjoyed, explaining why you liked it and why you think it would be a good choice for the school library.

We will use your reviews to help us decide which books to buy

Model answer

THE THIEVES OF OSTIA

„The thieves of Ostia“ by Caroline Lawrence is the first in a series of books entitled „The Roman Mysteries“ and I think it’s an absolute must for the school library.

The book is set in the Roman port of Ostia nearly two thousand years ago. It tells the story of Flavia and her three friends, and their attempts to discover who has been killing the dogs of Ostia and why. It’s full of mystery and excitement, and the plot has many twists and turns, which make you want to keep reading.

The book is aimed at ten – to twelve – year – old native English speakers, but it is very popular with older children and would be ideal for teenagers studying English. What’s more, it gives a fascinating insight into life in Roman times, so readers learn about history as well as improve their language skills.

After finishing „The Thieves of Ostia“, students will want to borrow further books from the series. By buying it, then, the library would be doing a lot to encourage students to read more in English

Model Answer 2

Topic:

You have found the following advertisement online:

RESTAURANT REVIEWS WANTED!

Have you been to a great restaurant lately? If so, send us an honest review of the restaurant explaining what you liked and disliked of the place as well as its location, staff and how it looks on the inside.

We will publish the first 20 decent reviews we get!

Model answer

Foster’s Hollywood

Being a huge fan of traditional American fast food and restaurant styles, it’s no wonder that my favourite restaurant in Granada is Foster’s Hollywood.

Located smack in the middle of the city, this fast-food chain serves a wide variety of mouthwatering, American dishes at a reasonable price. These range from typical Tex-Mex nachos or French fries to more elaborate meals like traditional, homemade Bourbon steak. And if you're hungry, it's the perfect place to go, as their servings are absolutely huge!

Another cool thing about this place is its magnificent decor. If you're a film buff, you will quickly fall in love with this place, since all the walls are covered in famous movie posters! Apart from that, it's got a spacious dining hall, super friendly staff and an outdoor terrace which is absolutely fantastic on summer nights!

The only negative thing I can say is that it is right next to a gym, which sometimes makes me feel guilty for eating so much!

Nevertheless, Foster's Hollywood offers delicious meals in an unbeatable atmosphere, so you should definitely give it a try. I promise you won't regret it!

B2 First (FCE) Review: Example Topics

Example Topic 1

Your teacher has asked you to write a review for a book you have read recently. The best reviews will go in the school magazine. Review the book giving your opinion and say whether or not you would recommend it.

Example Topic 2

Your teacher has asked you to write a review for a film you have seen recently on DVD or at the cinema. The best reviews will go in the school magazine. Review the book giving your opinion and saying whether or not you would recommend it.

Example Topic 3

At school, you are building a tourist website in English. Your teacher has asked you to write a review of a restaurant you have eaten at in your town. Review the restaurant giving your opinion and saying whether or not you would recommend it.

Writing Checklist

After writing your text, you can check it yourself using the **writing checklist** below.

How to do that? Simply check your text/email by **answering the questions one by one:**

Content

- Have I covered all the key information required by the task?
- Have I written only information which is relevant to the task?
- Have I developed the basic points in the task with my own ideas?

Communicative Achievement

- Have I achieved the main purpose(s) of the text (for example, explaining, persuading, suggesting, apologising, comparing, etc.)?
- Have I communicated a balance of straightforward and more complex ideas?
- Have I used a suitable style and register (formal or informal) for the task?

Organisation

- Have I used paragraphs appropriately to organise my ideas?
- Have I used other organisational features appropriately for the genre of the text (for example, titles, headings, openings, closings, etc.)?
- Is the connection between my ideas clear and easy for the reader to follow? (For example, have I used appropriate linking words, pronouns, etc. to refer to different things within the text?)
- Are the ideas balanced appropriately, with suitable attention and space given to each one?

Language

- Have I used a wide range of vocabulary?
- Have I avoided repeating the same words and phrases?
- Have I used a range of simple and more complex grammatical structures?
- Have I correctly used any common phrases which are relevant to the specific task or topic?
- Is my use of grammar accurate?
- Is my spelling accurate?

Tips



- **PLAN** your review.
- Make sure you have at least 4 paragraphs.
- Choose an **appropriate title**.
- The introduction will talk about what's being reviewed.
- Use a **relaxed, friendly**, chatty style.
- You can use contractions such as **I'm, I've** etc..
- Use a new paragraph for each point you want to make.

Grammar & Vocabulary

The grammar and vocabulary that you need unfortunately **depend** heavily on the **type of question** you get.

One thing you can do though is to make sure your **grammar** and **vocabulary** are **related to the tasks**. So for example, if you are writing a review about a **film** make sure your vocabulary is **related to films**.

So include words like *“scripts, director, cast, plot, setting, special effects, and stunts”*

FILM/BOOK

If you want to mention who directed the **film** or who played the part of a certain character then make sure you **use the passive** *“The film was directed by Y”*.
“The protagonist was played by X”.

EXPERIENCE

If you are talking about an **experience** and you need to describe the experience then make sure you use **narrative tenses** because obviously this experience happened in the past.

This means you need to use the **past simple, the past continuous** and the **past perfect**. For example *“I checked into the hotel at 10 am. I had been travelling all*

night and was feeling exhausted. The hotel staff were very welcoming and made me feel at home”.

Useful Phrases & Expressions

We will finish it with some useful vocabulary mostly used to organize information. Although it is **taking a shortcut**, if you learn several expressions for each paragraph in each type of text that could be on your exam, you will certainly be able to create a very consistent and well-organized text.

Giving background

This show stars...

The play is directed by...

The film is about...

It's set in.....

The story is based on (a book...)

It's about.....

There are many memorable characters including

The main theme of the film is.....

Expressions that introduce a contrast

On the plus side,...

On the down side,...

On the one hand,...

On the other hand,...

Recommending

Overall, I'd recommend...

All in all, the film was...

I wouldn't hesitate to recommend...

I wouldn't encourage anyone to ...

I would recommend this film to anyone.

Although I enjoyed it, I would not recommend it for....

It's one of the best (shows) I've ever seen.

Although I am not normally keen on (musicals), I am glad that I decided to go.

The (film) lifts you out of your everyday life

Frequently Asked Questions

Who will read the review?

Your review will be read by readers of a magazine.

What is the purpose of the review?

The review is intended to give information to the reader which will help them decide whether to attend the event themselves.

What style should I use?

Use a style similar to an article that is likely to interest the reader.

What information should I include?

Give essential information about the story, cast, band members, etc. Say what you like and didn't like about the performances. Make a recommendation to the reader about whether or not they should go.

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