

Writing Holiday Postcards - Audio in two podcast episodes (Parts 1 & 2)

This episode is devoted to how to write postcards (not podcasts!) when you have to comply with some requirements in a Writing Assignment or in a Writing Test.

► If you practice (US) / practise (UK) these Writing Strategies in your course Assignments, you will feel confident when you take your Exams!

Writing requirements are intended to test different skills:

- Your **English** (avoid grammar or spelling mistakes!!)
- **Textual Matters:** Textual Structure (organize well the information!) & Type of Text (what “ingredients” you need e.g. in a postcard)
- Your attention to **Context / Real Life** (communicative purpose, register)
- Your **Writing Strategies:** what you do **before** (think!), **during** (comply with requirements) and **after** (proofread!) writing your piece (yes, it is often shown in your piece).

Writing Strategies

Complying with Requirements. Typically, you have to comply with 1) sticking to the topic (*tema*), 2) a word limit & 3) you have to mention some points (to develop the topic):

1) Write about the **topic:** your holidays (in postcard format)

2) **Word limit**

- 60-80 (between 60 & 80 words)
 - 80-100 or
 - 100-125
- * If it says “100-125”, your minimum is 100 & your maximum 125
* If only 1 figure (*cifra*) is mentioned, you can write a 5%± or 10%± “80 words” means between 76 & 84 words (5%) “100 words” means 90-110 (10%)

✿ Tip: In exams, you shouldn’t count all your words, it’s not necessary. If you know your average (*tu media*), you can just count the lines.

3) **Set of points** (to develop the topic, which is, your holiday). For example:

- “What **did you do yesterday?**” (Oh, I need to use the past simple here)
- “What **are you doing now?**” (presents)
- “What **are you going to do tomorrow?**” (future of intention)

Obviously, wording the points is not completing the full text. You need a **beginning & ending** in your postcard (Textual Structure: beginning - body - ending) that is good for the Type of Text (the postcard).

✿ Tip: Don’t panic! You know about texts! The beginning of a story (a narrative) is not like the beginning of a postcard or a list, right? These are different Types of Texts, some share the same structure but each element in the structure is different.

If your points are questions, avoid making this mistake:

- *Yesterday we went to the museum* (new line)
- *Now we are having a drink in a café* (new line)
- *Tomorrow we are going on a boat trip*

This is not a postcard! It is an exercise of Questions & Answers! You should include those sentences in the text of your postcard.

Type of Text: the Postcard

A postcard is a personal (private) text addressed to someone. It has a beginning like “Dear ...” or “Hello!”. The body has paragraphs! (This is very important. And no, a sentence listed under another sentence is not “paragraphs”, that’s a list of sentences!) Typically, it has an ending in two steps, e.g. “See you next week” + “Love,”.

A postcard is usually addressed to a close relationship (a friend, a relative). In this case, it is in an informal style (you can use contractions – they count as two words, yes).

The lay-out in real life is two columns: on the left is the personal text, on the right somebody’s name and address. (In your exams you should not include addresses if they are not a requirement.)

Writing Skills: What do you have to do?

Read the instructions: **Writing Assignment:**

You are on a holiday abroad. Write a postcard (125 words) including the following information: ...

1. Visualizing the Physical Space for your Writing: What’s your average number of words per line? Mine is 12. If I have to write between 60 and 80 words I do this operation: 70 words divided by 10 words per line equals 7 lines. Conclusion: I can **visualize** that my writing, in my handwriting, will take about six full lines. With paragraphs for a postcard this will be a few more.

2. Calculating words in the structure: Now, consider the beginning & ending of your postcard. How many words can that take up?

a) Beginning:

Dear María, (2)
How are you? (3)
We’re in Paris! (4)

About 10 words

b) Ending:

See you next week! (4)
Love, (1)
John

PS Please, call mum & send her our love (9)

About 15 words

Total: About **25** words. If necessary, no PS! (for an extra 10 words)

c) Body: Dealing with the points. Now read the points carefully & **think about** a) what **tenses** you need & b) what **things** you can say in **how many** words.

You are on a holiday abroad. Write a postcard (125 words) including the following information (8 questions):

- **Are you having** a good time? (Oh, I need a **present continuous** here because this is happening now!) > **We’re having** a great time here! (7)

- When **did you arrive?** (past simple because the action is past and complete!) > **We arrived last Friday** (4)
- Where **are you staying?** (present continuous, because this is happening in this present period of my life!) > **We are staying in a small hotel in the city centre** (11)
- What **did you do yesterday?** (past simple) > **Yesterday we visited the ... Museum** (6)
- Where **are you now?** (presents: present continuous, e.g. “I am sitting in a French café right now!, or a present simple, e.g. “We are in the Louvre Coffee Shop) > **Now we are having a drink in a lovely café** (10)
- What **are you doing today?** (see page 5) > **Today we are visiting the city** (6)
- Say something about your holiday or the town/city (your favo(u)rite place or tourist routine) > **It’s a beautiful town/city. I love it!** (8)
- Mention the person you are writing to, e.g., You’d love this place!, or I wish you were here! > **You would love it, too!** (5)

Total: 60+ words + 25 w. = 85 w. OK. So now you have 40 extra words to add!
Of course, this isn’t complicated! You can do it mentally and really fast.
Yes, all the process BEFORE you write should take you a couple of minutes.

❁ Tip: If it’s an exam, DON’T waste time writing out a draft. You need time for other things!

4. Writing the postcard. Notice the paragraphing.

Dear María,
How are you?
We’re in Paris! We’re having a great time here!
We arrived last Friday. We’re staying in a little hotel in the city centre. It is small but it has views to a lovely garden. (Present simple because it is a general truth)
Yesterday we visited the Louvre Museum. It’s really big! You can get lost! I loved the Mona Lisa!
Now we’re having a drink in a lovely café.
This morning we **walked** in Mont Matre and bought some paintings of Paris. Later on we are going **to go** on a boat trip in the Bateau Mouché! And this evening we’re going to a jazz concert!
Paris is so exciting!!
We must come here together next year, OK?
Lots of love,
John
PS: Send mum our love!

Total no. of words: ±120. The Assignment says 125, so it’s OK –the 10%. I can also add about two words... Let’s see... I’m going to add “**And it’s sunny!**” after “We’re in Paris.” It’s 4 words, but that’s OK.

Now suppose you have to write 80 words. Then we need to cross out 40 or 50 words in my piece, right? Give it a try now!

❁ Tip: It’s OK to cross out things in a Writing Test (a line across is enough. Don’t use white-out liquid -- you’ll forget to fill in the gap!)

5. Adding or Crossing Out - (Example of crossing out 40 or 50 words)

First of all, it's OK to cross out a few words here or there, but writing too much is a mistake! Respect the limit! If you don't read the instructions this can happen, so READ the INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY! (BEFORE writing, think!) And don't waste time writing a draft copy, because then you won't have time to make a clean copy! You can jot down some ideas/words, that's all.

When you start writing your postcard, leave **space between the lines** in case you need to add something. When you cross out things, remember not to cross out information you *have to* mention! And remember to cross out what is not important, to respect the structure of your text.

Dear María,
How are you?
We're in Paris! We're having a great time here!
We arrived last Friday. We're staying in a little hotel ~~in the city centre~~. It is small but it has ~~views to~~ a lovely garden.
Yesterday we visited the Louvre Museum. It's really big! ~~You can get lost!~~ ~~I loved the Mona Lisa!~~
Now we're having a drink in a lovely café.
This morning we walked in Mont Matre and bought some paintings ~~of Paris~~. Later on ~~we are going on a boat trip in the Bateau Mouché!~~ ~~And this evening we're going to a jazz concert!~~
Paris is so exciting!!
~~We~~ You must come! ~~here together next year, OK?~~
Lots of love,
John
PS: ~~Send mum our love!~~

Did you cross out the same bits?

5. Proofreading: you should check your writing carefully after you finish it.

Read it first to check grammar: agreement of subjects and verbs (number: we WERE not was!), agreement of auxiliary and main verb (aux=do/can/would, V=bare infinitive; aux=be, V= -ing form; aux=have, V=past participle), adjectives with no -s before the noun, paragraphs, possessives and gender (his, her), prepositions.

Read it **out loud in your mind** to check it makes sense, it is well-organized.

❁ Tip: If you add changes (crossings out and additions) remember you have to read it all again.

With practice, you will be able to do this faster than you can imagine now and cross out or add just two or three words. With practice, you won't have to count each word during a test! What a waste of time!

❁ Tip: Start practicing (US) / practising (UK) now! Use the Writing Assignments in the units you studied before.

EXTRA EXPLANATIONS: exceptions in the “going to” **future** & **present perfect**

* **The futures** are introduced in Elementary (Básico 1) courses, especially the “going to” future or Future to indicate Plans and (AngloSaxon) Intentions.

“Going to” future formula = *to be* (in the present) + **going** + **to-infinitive**

We are **going to** speak English today
When are you **going to** see them?

Exceptions: when the main verb is “go” - **We are going to go**

* **Tenses and “today”** - the **present perfect** is introduced at the end of Elementary courses (Básico 1) and then practiced and consolidated in Pre-intermediate courses (Básico 2).

If you are asked to write about your day and you haven’t studied the present perfect, you can just use the past simple with “this morning” (then now it is the afternoon), the present simple and continuous for “now/at the moment”.

When we speak about “**today**” we can use different tenses, depending on our point of view.

It’s sunny (present simple) so we **are going** (~~to go**~~) on a boat trip (future action today)

This morning we **went** to the Louvre Museum

(“This morning” indicates it’s not the morning anymore. So I need to use a past simple for my past complete action)

At the moment we **are having** a drink in a French café

(“At the moment” tells me I have to use a present cont. if it makes sense)

At the moment it **is** sunny (but it’s not always possible!)

Later on we **are going to have dinner** in a very special French restaurant

(“Later on” tells me the action is a future, in this case, a future of intention)

But there’s more!!

TODAY & the present perfect

Today we **have visited** a museum, we **have had a drink** in a French café, and we **have had dinner** in a very French restaurant.

Why are all the verbs in the **present perfect**? (aux=have/has + V=past participle) Because my point of view is TODAY and TODAY **hasn’t finished** yet. This sentence is only possible at the end of the day.

Present perfect versus past simple in TODAY

It’s 11.00 am. Phone rings at 10.00. “Mary, your mother (tense?) (this morning)” > has phoned (present perfect - we’re in the same chunk of time)

It’s 17.00 am. Phone rings at 10.00. “Mary, your mother (tense?) (this morning)” > phoned (past simple - we’re in a different chunk of time)