English Entry Level 3

Complete Study Guide

Everything you need to know — explained step by step

About the EL3 English Exam

Total marks: ~45 | **Pass mark:** ~27 (around 60%)

Section A — Reading: ~25 marks. Two passages + comprehension + SPaG questions.

Section B — Writing: ~20 marks. One informal task (8 marks) + one formal task (12 marks).

Time: Approximately 1 hour 15 minutes.

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1. Spelling Common Words

The exam tests whether you can spot correct spellings. These are the words people get wrong most often.

Word	Wrong Spelling	Memory Trick
because	becuase, becorse	be-CAUSE
definitely	definately	de-FINITE-ly
different	diffrent	differ-ent
received	recieved	i before e after c
Wednesday	Wendsday	Wed-NES-day
business	buisness	bus-i-ness
necessary	neccessary	1 collar, 2 socks
separate	seperate	A RAT in separate
accommodation	accomodation	double c, double m
beautiful	beatiful	Big Elephants Are Ugly
government	goverment	govern + ment
environment	enviroment	environ + ment

Rule: i before e, except after c
believe, achieve, receive, ceiling — but exceptions: weird, their, height

Tip: Read options carefully. Wrong spellings often look 'almost right.' Say the word slowly in your head.

Common Mistake: Don't trust spell-check habits. In the exam you must spot the right spelling yourself.

Practice: 1) accomodation / accommodation / acomodation? → **accommodation**
2) goverment / government / govenment? → **government**
3) enviroment / environment / enviorment? → **environment**

2. Capital Letters & Full Stops

When to Use a Capital Letter

Always use a capital for:
• Start of every sentence • The word 'I' (always)
• Names of people (Sarah, Mr Thompson) • Places (London, Spain)
• Days (Monday, Saturday) • Months (January, March)
• Titles (Dr, Mrs, Mr) • Companies (Tesco, BBC, NHS)
• Languages/nationalities (English, British) • Festivals (Christmas, Easter)

When NOT to Use a Capital

Common over-capitalisation
✗ 'He went to the Park.' → ✓ 'He went to the park.' (not a named park)
✗ 'She is a Doctor.' → ✓ 'She is a doctor.' (but 'She saw Dr Patel.' ✓)
✗ 'We Had Fish And Chips.' → ✓ 'We had fish and chips.'

Full Stops

A full stop goes at the end of every complete sentence.
A sentence = a complete thought with a subject and a verb.
'The cat sat on the mat.' ✓
'The cat sat on the mat it was soft' ✗ — this is two sentences run together.

Common Mistake: Run-on sentences (two sentences without a full stop) are the most common mistake at EL3.

Practice: 1) Fix: 'i went to london on saturday with emma.' → **I went to London on Saturday with Emma.**
2) Fix: 'the bbc is a british company.' → **The BBC is a British company.**

3. Commas & Punctuation

Use a comma:

- **In lists:** 'I bought eggs, milk, bread, and butter.'
- **After introductory phrases:** 'After dinner, we watched a film.'
- **After linking words:** 'However, the bus was late.'
- **Before 'but':** 'I wanted to go, but it was raining.'
- **After 'if' clauses:** 'If it rains, we'll stay inside.'
- **In letter greetings:** 'Dear Mr Smith,' (comma, not full stop)
- **Before names when addressing someone:** 'Thank you, Mrs Singh.'

Question Marks and Exclamation Marks

Question mark (?) — at the end of a question: 'What time is it?'
Exclamation mark (!) — surprise, danger, strong feeling: 'Watch out!' 'What a lovely day!'

Tip: In writing tasks, use commas in lists and after introductory phrases. Easy marks!

Practice: 1) Add comma: 'If you are free we could meet.' → **If you are free, we could meet.**
2) Add commas: 'She likes reading swimming and cooking.' → **She likes reading, swimming and cooking.**

4. Apostrophes

Apostrophes do two jobs: show belonging (possession) and shorten words (contraction).

Apostrophes for Possession

One owner: add 's → the dog's tail, Sarah's coat, the teacher's desk
Plural owners (ending in s): add ' → the boys' uniforms, the babies' toys
Special plurals: add 's → the children's bikes, the men's room

Apostrophes for Contractions

Full Form	Contraction	Missing
do not	don't	the o
it is / it has	it's	the i / ha
they are	they're	the a
we are	we're	the a
you are	you're	the a
I will	I'll	the wi
could not	couldn't	the o
did not	didn't	the o
have not	haven't	the o

The Big One: it's vs its

Common Mistake: Most tested apostrophe question!
it's = it is OR it has ('It's raining' = 'It is raining')
its (no apostrophe) = belonging to it ('The dog wagged its tail')
Test: Can you replace it with 'it is'? If yes → it's. If no → its.

Practice: 1) 'The cat licked ___ paws.' → **its** (belonging to the cat)
2) '___ going to be a long day.' → **It's** (it is)
3) 'The ___ toys were in the garden.' → **children's**

5. Homophones & Confusing Words

Homophones sound the same but have different meanings and spellings. They appear in almost every exam.

The Big Three Sets

to / too / two
to = direction or purpose ('I went to the shop' / 'I went to buy milk')
too = also OR too much ('I'm coming too' / 'It's too expensive')
two = the number 2 ('He has two brothers')

there / their / they're
there = a place ('Put it over there')
their = belonging to them ('Their house is big')
they're = they are ('They're coming to the party')

your / you're
your = belonging to you ('Your coat is here')
you're = you are ('You're coming, aren't you?')

Other Common Pairs

Word	Meaning	Confused With
hear	to listen	here (a place)
where	a place	were / wear
know	have knowledge	no (opposite of yes)
piece	a part	peace (no war)
new	not old	knew (past of know)
through	one side to another	threw (past of throw)
ate	past of eat	eight (number 8)

Tip: Quick test for they're/their/there: Can you replace it with 'they are'? → they're. Shows belonging? → their. About a place? → there.

Practice: 1) 'I went ___ the shop ___ buy milk.' → **to / to**
2) '___ going to put ___ bags over ___.' → **They're / their / there**

6. Verb Tenses

Present Tense

I go / She **goes** / They go
For he/she/it, add **-s** or **-es**: she walks, he goes, it runs

Past Tense — Regular Verbs

Add **-ed**: walk → walked, play → played, bake → baked

Past Tense — Irregular Verbs (Learn These!)

Present	Past	With 'have'
go	went	gone / been
run	ran	run
catch	caught	caught
see	saw	seen
eat	ate	eaten
know	knew	known
lose	lost	lost
buy	bought	bought
write	wrote	written
do	did	done

Common Mistake: 'Goed,' 'runned,' 'catched,' 'knowed' are NOT real words!
✗ 'Yesterday I goed to the shops.' → ✓ 'Yesterday I went to the shops.'

Present Continuous

am/is/are + verb-ing
'I am eating dinner.' / 'She is reading.' / 'They are playing.'

Practice: 1) 'Yesterday I ___ my keys.' → **lost**
2) 'She ___ to school every day.' → **walks**
3) 'We have never ___ to Spain.' → **been**

7. Subject-Verb Agreement

The verb must match the subject. Singular subjects need singular verbs. Plural subjects need plural verbs.

Singular (one): The dog **is** / She **goes** / He **does**
Plural (more than one): The dogs **are** / They **go** / We **do**

Tricky Cases

Words that LOOK plural but are SINGULAR
'The news **is** on at six.' (not 'are')
'Mathematics **is** my favourite.' (not 'are')
'Everyone **is** welcome.' (not 'are')
'Nobody **knows** the answer.' (not 'know')

Compound subjects = plural
'Tom and Lisa **are** friends.' (two people = plural)
'My brother and I **are** going out.'

Common Mistake: Don't be tricked by words between subject and verb!
'The books **on the shelf** are dusty.' — subject is 'books' (plural)
'One **of the students** is absent.' — subject is 'one' (singular)

Practice: 1) 'The children ___ playing.' → **are** (plural)
2) 'Everyone ___ welcome.' → **is** (singular)
3) 'There ___ three apples on the table.' → **are** (plural)

8. Reading for Information

In the exam you'll read real-world texts: adverts, notices, emails, timetables, labels and leaflets.

Key Phrases You'll See

Phrase	What It Means
Best before	Best quality before this date
Experience desirable but not essential	Nice to have, not required
Please find attached	A document is with this email
Out of order	Broken / not working
Next of kin	Nearest relative / emergency contact
Subject to availability	Only if stock/space is left
Terms and conditions apply	Extra rules — read them!
RSVP	Please reply to confirm
No strings attached	No hidden conditions
Yours faithfully	For Dear Sir/Madam letters
Yours sincerely	For Dear [Name] letters
On behalf of	Representing someone else
Mandatory	Required / compulsory

Reading Strategy

Step 1: Skim the text — what kind is it? Who's it for?
Step 2: Read the question carefully.
Step 3: Scan for key words from the question.
Step 4: Check your answer matches what the text says, not what you think.

Tip: For 2-mark questions, you usually need TWO pieces of information or an explanation. One-word answers won't be enough.

Common Mistake: Only use what the text tells you. Don't use your own knowledge or opinions.

9. Formal vs Informal Writing

Formal Writing	Informal Writing
Letters to companies, landlords, schools	Texts to friends and family
Job applications	WhatsApp messages
Complaints and official requests	Notes to neighbours
Emails to teachers, doctors	Social media posts

Formal Writing Features

Opening: 'Dear Mr Thompson,' / 'Dear Sir/Madam,'
Tone: Polite, professional, no slang
Phrases: 'I am writing to...', 'I would be grateful if...', 'I look forward to hearing from you.'
Closing: 'Yours sincerely,' (used name) / 'Yours faithfully,' (Dear Sir/Madam)
Avoid: slang (gonna, wanna), text speak (u, 2, gr8)

Informal Writing Features

Opening: 'Hi!', 'Hey!', 'Hiya!'
Tone: Friendly, relaxed, chatty
Closing: 'Thanks!', 'See you soon!', 'Chat later!'

Common Mistake: The biggest mistake is using informal language in a formal task. 'Hi' instead of 'Dear' or 'Cheers' instead of 'Yours sincerely' will lose marks.

10. Writing Tasks — How to Get Top Marks

What the examiner looks for:
Content & Purpose: Did you include everything the task asked for?
Organisation: Logical order? Paragraphs?
SPaG: Spelling, punctuation, grammar — are they accurate?

Task 1: Informal Writing (8 marks)

Structure for an informal message

1. Greeting: 'Hi [name]!' or 'Hey!'
2. Reason for writing: get straight to the point
3. Main information: cover all bullet points
4. Your thoughts/feelings: add a personal opinion
5. Sign off: 'See you soon!' / 'Chat later!'

Task 2: Formal Writing (12 marks)

Structure for a formal letter or email

1. Greeting: 'Dear Mr/Mrs [name],' or 'Dear Sir/Madam,'
2. Opening paragraph: state why you are writing
3. Middle paragraph(s): details, examples, reasons
4. Closing paragraph: what you want to happen next
5. Sign off: 'Yours sincerely,' / 'Yours faithfully,'
6. Your name

Top Tips

Tip: • Read the bullet points — every bullet = marks. Miss one = lose marks.
• Write in sentences, not bullet points or notes.
• Use paragraphs — even 2-3 short ones shows organisation.
• Check spelling — especially because, definitely, their/there.
• Use commas in lists and after introductory phrases.
• Stick to the word count — 6-10 sentences for Task 1, 8-12 for Task 2.

Useful Formal Phrases

Purpose	Phrase
Opening	'I am writing to complain about...' / 'I am writing to apply for...'
Giving details	'The issue is...' / 'On [date], I...' / 'For example,...'
Requesting action	'I would be grateful if you could...' / 'Could you please...'
Closing	'I look forward to hearing from you.' / 'Thank you for your time.'

Common Mistake: The #1 reason people fail writing: not answering ALL parts of the task. If it says include three things — include all three. Read the task TWICE before writing.

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