

# Essential CELPIP® Grammar and Vocabulary

For Writing & Speaking

Erica L. Meltzer

▲ THE CRITICAL READER

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**ALSO BY ERICA L. MELTZER**

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# Table of Contents

	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>Diagnostic Test</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>Part I: Mastering CELPIP® Writing</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Overview and Timing</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Organizing Your Responses</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Greetings and Closings</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Avoiding Extremes</b>	<b>35</b>
	<b>Part II: Essential Grammar</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Basic Conventions and Punctuation</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Articles and Determiners</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Sentences and Fragments</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Direct and Indirect Questions</b>	<b>98</b>
	<b>Part III: Key Vocabulary and Usage</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Formal and Informal Language</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Paraphrasing</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>11.</b>	<b>Countable and Uncountable Nouns</b>	<b>158</b>

<b>12.</b>	<b>Numbers and Money</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>13.</b>	<b>Prepositions and Phrasal Verbs</b>	<b>175</b>
	<b>Part IV: Additional Grammar</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>14.</b>	<b>Verb Tense</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>15.</b>	<b>Adjectives That Aren't Adjectives</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>16.</b>	<b>Subject-Verb Agreement</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>17.</b>	<b>Pronouns I: Agreement in Number</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>18.</b>	<b>Pronouns II: People vs. Things</b>	<b>282</b>
<b>19.</b>	<b>Adjective and Adverb Placement</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>20.</b>	<b>Making Comparisons</b>	<b>293</b>
	<b>Answer Key</b>	<b>301</b>

# Introduction

Let's start this book with some good news: you do not need to have perfect grammar to earn a high score in CELPIP® Writing and Speaking. In fact, if you read through the samples provided by the test-writers, you will notice that even responses scoring 10-12 may contain a mistake or two.

Now for the bad news, though: if you want to achieve Band 9+ in these sections, your grammar does still need to be quite strong. While good grammar alone will not ensure a strong mark, too many errors in this area will prevent you from scoring above the 7-8 range and thus from obtaining the maximum number of points in the English Proficiency Index used for Canadian and Australian immigration.

To be clear, demonstrating your knowledge of English on the CELPIP is not just about using lots of complicated tenses or fancy vocabulary. Rather, it is about conveying your ideas clearly while using constructions that are suitable for the various situations you are given, and doing so at the appropriate level of formality or informality.

Unlike IELTS®, which marks grammar as a separate category, the CELPIP factors grammar into the “Readability” and “Listenability” scores. This is done firstly because the test emphasizes practical speaking and writing skills rather than academic communication; and secondly, to dissuade candidates from taking an overly rule-based approach to studying English.

On one hand, it is obviously of limited value to do rote exercises without considering how, for example, different tenses are used to make polite requests or discuss future events. But that said, the entire CELPIP Writing and Speaking tests are essentially exercises in applied grammar. Understanding how English words can and cannot be put together is the key to expressing yourself well, and this book is designed to help you understand how to use key grammar and vocabulary to maximize your score.

Because grammar is considered in terms of your overall communicative abilities, the scoring rubric should not be mistaken for a fixed formula. In other words, to ask, “How many mistakes can I make and still score Band 9?” is to miss the point of the test. Instead, you should aim to write and speak as accurately and naturally as possible. That does not mean you should be casual about your preparation, though. To learn to use English more naturally and effectively, you may need to spend significant time practicing various concepts individually until the correct usage becomes automatic.

While this book is structured to move from general to specific—that is, from issues involving overall essay construction down through increasingly detailed grammatical concerns—it does not necessarily need to be worked through in order. I have done my best to address typical errors made by writers from a range of linguistic backgrounds, and if you already understand a given concept well, I encourage you to skip that section and spend your time on areas in which you do need to focus.

—Erica Meltzer

## Diagnostic Test (answers p. 301)

The sentences below contain some of the trickiest English constructions and are designed to help you identify common constructions that you may need to focus on. In each sentence, determine whether the underlined portion is acceptable, and make any correction necessary. Complete this exercise as quickly as you can.

1. In addition to my son, my wife and I have a five-years-old daughter.
2. I work at the company since 2020.
3. I usually drink two cups of coffee a day, I have one around 9am and another around noon.
4. The missing item is a brown large briefcase.
5. I'm sure you will be able to cope with the increase workload.
6. I definitely recommend you go up to the top of the CN Tower.
7. This is first time I have visited the city.
8. I know you have serious knee injury.
9. I am planning to take a two-weeks vacation in July.
10. Last Thursday, I eat at your restaurant with my co-worker.
11. I only wore this shoes once before the soles came off.
12. The woman is asking to the waiter a question.
13. The room is quite crowded—there is so much people there.
14. I know you love outdoor sports, especially during the winter.

15. If we opened a delivery business, we would need to invest all our savings.
16. Although I have visited Toronto many times, but I only know a few neighbourhoods well.
17. Thanks so much for suggesting me to visit the aquarium!
18. Next time, I'd like to try skiing down a steeper slope.
19. The child who want the toy is holding a red balloon.
20. Without the discount, the toaster cost nearly 100 \$.
21. She's holding onto the oranges right now, but I think she's going to drop it.
22. I am very interesting in learning more about your offer.
23. High levels of income inequality can create serious problems for the society.
24. I'm planning to arrive on next Saturday.
25. The guy looks like he's been standing on the corner for hours.
26. I asked several staffs, but they were unable to answer my question.
27. There is also a little boy which is holding his father's hand.
28. My grandmother gave me a really good advice.
29. I'm not sure which way should I turn when I get to your street.
30. It looks as if one of the books is about to fall off the shelf.



# **Part I: Mastering CELPIP Writing**



# 1. Overview and Timing

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## Writing Overview

The CELPIP® Writing Test consists of two short responses (“Task 1” and “Task 2”) of 150-200 words in the form of emails intended to reflect everyday situations that are typical of life in Canada.

### Task 1: 27 minutes, 150-200 words

Task 1 is always a letter. It can be **informal** (e.g., to a friend or a family member); **semi-formal** (e.g., to a colleague); or **formal** (e.g., to a landlord or manager).

In this assignment, you may be asked to:

- Offer advice or support
- Ask for assistance
- Make a complaint
- Explain a problem and propose a solution

### Task 2: 26 minutes, 150-200 words

Task 2 is always presented in the form of a survey. You will be given a scenario involving a question of professional or local concern, along with two possible outcomes or solutions (e.g., Would it be better to have a park or a mall built in your small town?). You must explain which one you prefer and why.

Task 2 may require more formal language than Task 1. While you can include personal reasons, you are also expected to consider your company or community. In addition, you must not only state your preference, but also explain why you believe it is **better** than the other option.

Because the exam is administered on a computer only, you do not need to worry about your handwriting. A spell-check function is also included, although it will not catch errors involving wrong but correctly spelled words, e.g., *quite* instead of *quiet*.

## Writing Scoring

CELP Writing is scored from Band 0 (lowest) to Band 12 (highest), a scale that directly corresponds to the CLB language-proficiency scale used by the Canadian and Australian governments when awarding points for immigration and visas.

If you are applying for Canadian **Permanent Residence**, you must score Band 4 or higher to earn points for English proficiency, and Band 9 or higher to earn the maximum number of language points. (You must also obtain scores of 9+ on the other three parts of the test). In Writing, Australian government requires a minimum of 7 points; 10 points to be considered “Proficient”; and the full 12 points to be rated “Superior.” Note that these scores are higher than the requirements in the other three categories.

Essays are scored in four categories:

### Content / Coherence

Does the response make sense overall? Does it have a logical structure and progress clearly from point to point? Are transitional words and phrases (e.g., *however*, *in addition*) used to indicate relationships between ideas and introduce new points?

### Task Fulfillment

Is your answer fully developed? Have you responded to all parts of the question?

### Vocabulary

Have you used topic-specific vocabulary and idiomatic language at an appropriate level of formality or informality? Have you paraphrased the original question, or have you copied it word for word?

### Readability

Is your response separated into paragraphs corresponding to distinct points? Does it include sentences of different lengths and types? Are there a variety of grammatical structures, and are they used appropriately? If there are errors, do they interfere with the reader’s understanding?

As discussed in the introduction, these are general guidelines rather than a fixed formula. To reiterate, you should do your best to write clearly and naturally, and to avoid using the same words and ideas repeatedly. If you can write a well-organized answer that uses specific language and addresses all parts of the prompt, minor grammatical errors will not prevent you from obtaining a 9+ Band score.

## CELPIP Writing Is Not Academic Writing!

**Please read this section if you have previously taken IELTS.**

If you have already written IELTS (either General or Academic Training) and are switching to the CELPIP, you should be aware that there are some important differences between the writing portions of the two tests.

Whereas IELTS General Training and CELPIP Task 1 questions are very similar, Task 2 differs substantially. It is important to understand that unlike IELTS Task 2, **CELPIP Task 2 is not an academic essay but rather a personal response to a situation in your professional life or community**. For this reason, you should avoid the type of detached, scholarly language that is expected in academic writing, e.g., *I will substantiate my claim in the following paragraphs* or *There is considerable evidence to support this claim*. A more personal style is required.

It is also important to recognize that CELPIP Task 2 responses are not IELTS-style “advantages and disadvantages” essays. Although you will always be presented with two options, you are not asked to discuss both equally but rather to argue in favour of one side only. While it is a good idea to refer to the option you disagree with, the side you do agree with should be the main focus of your email.

Finally, while it is of course acceptable to write about your own reactions, experiences, and preferences, in Task 2 responses, you should seek to balance these with discussions of how other people will be affected by a particular option. Essentially, this assignment asks you to think beyond yourself and consider the impact on your workplace, neighbourhood, or city.

## Overview of Speaking

The CELPIP Speaking Test consists of eight short tasks requiring responses of 60-90 seconds, with 30 seconds of preparation time immediately beforehand. You will also be given an optional warm-up task so that you have an opportunity to practice on an unscored response.

The tasks are as follows and are designed to move in approximate order of difficulty.

- 1) Giving Advice
- 2) Talking About a Personal Experience
- 3) Describing a Scene
- 4) Making Predictions
- 5) Comparing and Persuading
- 6) Dealing with a Difficult Situation
- 7) Expressing Opinions
- 8) Describing an Unusual Situation

Like Writing, CELPIP Speaking is scored in four separate categories, with grammar included under “Listenability”.

### **Content/Coherence**

Does the response make sense overall? Is it structured in a generally logical way? Do you develop your ideas and provide specific examples to support them?

### **Vocabulary**

Do you use a variety of topic-specific words accurately, or do you continually repeat the same set of words throughout your response?

### **Listenability**

Can the response be easily understood? Do you use different types of sentence structure? Do your accent and intonation (rhythm of your speech) sound natural, or do you pause frequently to correct yourself?

### **Task Fulfillment**

Did you stay on-topic for the duration of your response, or did you bring in irrelevant information? Did you respond to the question fully, using an appropriate tone and level of formality or informality?

While this might strike you as a lot to ask from responses barely a minute long, the reality is less intimidating than it might seem. **The most important thing you are being tested on is your ability to speak naturally.** You are in no way expected to deliver a formal, perfectly organized speech—and you should not trust any source with model answers that indicate otherwise. In fact, if you go on the CELPIP website and listen to the model answers, you will find that even the highest scoring responses contain pauses and “ummmms...” and basically just sound like an average person talking to a friend or a co-worker.

You should, however, be aware that certain tasks are designed to elicit specific types of grammar and vocabulary. For example, “Giving Advice” (Task 1) is targeted toward the modal verbs *should* and *would*, as well as various structures involving the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *advise*. “Describing a Scene” (Task 3) assesses your ability to choose between different types of present tense (simple vs. continuous), whereas “Making Predictions” (Task 4) requires you to use the future. As a result, you must be comfortable using a range of tenses to score well in this portion of the exam.

To earn maximum points for Canadian permanent residence, you must achieve a minimum Band 9 Speaking score. For Australia, you must earn a minimum of 8 for “Proficient” and 10 for “Superior.”

## 2. Organizing Your Responses

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Your essay's appearance is the first thing a reader will notice, and he or she will form an initial judgment based on it. An essay that is neatly divided into paragraphs, with a full line left blank between them, indicates that you can organize your ideas and make them easy for a reader to follow. In contrast, a solid block of text suggests that your ideas will all be mixed together. In other words, your essay should look like the example below **(just look don't read)**:

Dear Town Committee Members:

Given the choice between the proposed shopping complex and the recreational park, I believe that the park would be the better option overall.

First, it would give young people a place to participate in organized sports and perhaps other activities after school. As you may know, there have been several recent incidents involving high school students loitering near the elementary school and harassing younger children in the afternoon. Although nothing serious has occurred, the problem would be resolved if teenagers had a place to spend their free time constructively.

Moreover, many of the town's children are far too sedentary and spend excessive amounts of time on electronic devices. Having access to a large open space would encourage them to be more active, and the exposure to farm animals would help them develop an appreciation for the natural world.

Finally, please consider that there is already a major shopping centre less than 10 km away that can be easily reached by public transit. A mall with the same big box stores and fast-food chains would be unlikely to attract enough visitors or generate sufficient revenue to justify the cost of its construction.

I appreciate your taking these comments into consideration.

Best Regards,  
Jane McResident

It should not look like this:

Dear Town Committee Members:

Given the choice between the proposed shopping complex and the recreational park, I believe that the park would be the overall better option. First, it would provide teenagers a place to participate in organized sports and perhaps other activities after school. As you may be aware, there have been several recent incidents involving secondary school students loitering near the elementary school and harassing younger children during the late afternoon. Although nothing serious has occurred, this problem would be mitigated if adolescents had a place to spend their free time more constructively. Moreover, many of the town's children are currently far too sedentary and spend excessive amounts of time on electronic devices. Having access to a large open space would encourage them to be more physically active, and the exposure to farm animals would help them learn about the natural world. Finally, please consider that there is already a major shopping centre less than 10 km away that can be easily reached by public transit. A mall with the same big box stores and fast-food chains would be unlikely to attract enough visitors or generate sufficient revenue to justify the cost of its construction. I appreciate your taking these comments into consideration.

Best Regards,  
Jane McResident

In **Task 1**, the prompt provides a logical paragraph structure for your response: the specific questions you must answer are listed as bullet points, and you should simply address them in order.

For example, in a complaint letter about a broken item, your structure would look like this:

- Describe the item – Discuss 1<sup>st</sup>
- Say when it was purchased – Discuss 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Explain how the problem could be resolved – Discuss 3<sup>rd</sup>

In some cases, you may need to devote a separate paragraph (about 2-3 sentences) to each point, whereas in others it may make more sense to discuss two points together. You should always plan to have at least two body paragraphs, however.

### **Being Specific**

One factor that plays an important but often overlooked role in obtaining a high score is specificity. This is not just a matter of describing complaints, requests, etc., in detail. Very high-scoring essays tend to “set the scene”: writers are able to imagine themselves in the indicated situation and give the impression that they are genuinely communicating with another person or organization, not just responding to a prompt on a test.

They also take care to establish **context** at the beginning of their response—to briefly but clearly indicate their prior relationship with the receiver of their email. This allows them to establish an appropriate tone and signal to the reader that they have strong control of their expressive language.

Compare the two sample Task 1 openings below. The assignment is to write a complaint letter to a apartment-building manager about an out-of-service elevator.

Dear Mr. Mehta,

My name is Anna Chang, and I live in Apartment 12J. I am writing because the elevator that goes to my floor is not working, and this is causing many problems for me and the other tenants.

This is a fairly typical Band 8-ish response. There are no serious grammatical problems, but there is nothing particularly interesting or engaging about the writing either.

Now look at this version:

Dear Mr. Mehta,

My name is Anna Chang, and I live in Apartment 12J. As a five-year resident of Kensington Gardens, I am very grateful for your exceptional care in maintaining the building. It is always a pleasure to come home after a long day and find fresh flowers in the lobby or newly waxed floors in the hallways.

This type of opening immediately puts the response in the 10-12 range. Not only does it establish the sort of gracious tone that would make a building manager receptive to a tenant's concerns, but it includes concrete details (the building name, fresh flowers, waxed floors) that immediately allow the reader to imagine the situation.

Because Task 2 involves a less personal scenario, it is not as important to include this type of background information. However, you can certainly do so if you find it helpful and are able to draw on your real-life experience. For example, if you work for a company with a relatively laid-back culture and are accustomed to having an informal relationship with your boss, your response to an office survey might begin something like this:

Hi Taylor,

Thanks so much for reaching out to me and the other team members for our input on the conference location. After the scheduling incidents last month, I really appreciate it!

Again, this type of language quickly establishes the writer as an approachable individual who knows how to communicate well in a professional environment.

Otherwise, in Task 2, unlike Task 1, you are responsible for generating the individual points and organizing your essay logically. To ensure that your argument in favour of your preferred option is as strong as possible, you should spend a few minutes generating ideas and outlining your points before you begin to write.

Keep in mind that your choice does not need to reflect your actual preference, but rather the option for which you can craft the strongest argument in 26 minutes. That said, you will probably find it easier to come up with ideas if you genuinely believe in your argument.

### **Brainstorming and Outlining**

Once you have decided whether you prefer Option A or Option B, you should spend a minute or so **brainstorming**—that is, generating a short list of ideas to support your argument.

To do this, you should quickly make a list of the advantages. Then, you can select the strongest points to focus on in your essay.

For example, if the question asked you to decide whether a new elementary school or a new senior centre should be built in your town, your notes might look something like the ones below.

Let's assume that you're arguing in favour of the senior centre.

<b>Senior Centre Advantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seniors who spend more time socializing are healthier, have a higher quality of life.</li><li>• Would give families a break from watching older relatives who require care and supervision.</li><li>• No existing facility for the elderly; seniors must use the library or a coffee shop.</li><li>• Seniors are often uncomfortable with technology but might not have other ways to meet new people.</li></ul>

The points you choose should be as different from one another as possible to prevent repetition. When you have selected the top two or three, write a brief outline to organize your response.

Although you are not technically required to write a specific number of paragraphs for either CELPIP essay, **you should plan to follow a four- or five-paragraph structure for Task 2. This ensures a clear presentation of your points and prevents you from including too few or too many ideas.**

You can use the template below to organize your essay. Note that the number of sentences in each paragraph will vary based on content and length. That said, you should aim to have at least two and no more than five.

Greeting

- I. Introduction: state your preference (1-2 sentences)
- II. Body Paragraph 1 (approx. 3 sentences)
- III. Body Paragraph 2 (approx. 3 sentences)
- IV. Optional Body Paragraph 3 (approx. 3 sentences)
- V. Conclusion (1-2 sentences)

Closing,

Name

You are the only person who will see your outline, so **you can abbreviate and/or use symbols such as arrows to save time.** Your only goal is to establish a clear structure and to ensure that you cover all your points. You should aim to have a couple of supporting ideas for each point. (One is fine if you have an exceptionally strong example, but you will not have room to discuss more than two in 150-200 words.)

For example:

- I. Intro – Prefer senior ctr, better f/whole community
- II. No existing space just for seniors
  - Library available, but can't talk/socialize
  - Coffee shops not always good for groups; loud, elderly people may have trouble hearing
- III. Senior centre would benefit society, not just the elderly
  - Practical – Adults work, can't watch elderly parents all day
  - Seniors can socialize, which improves mood and cognitive function
- IV. Conclusion

## Topic Sentences

Each of your body paragraphs should begin with a **topic sentence** that clearly and directly supports your opinion and introduces the focus of your paragraph. This will help your reader follow your argument and understand the relevance of your examples.

In addition, each topic sentence should begin with a transitional word or phrase (e.g., *firstly*, *to begin*, *moreover*, *in addition*) that indicates the coming paragraph's relationship to the previous paragraph and role within the argument.

Please note that **this is not the place for fancy language**. Transitions are “formulas”, and you should not attempt to rewrite common expressions or use fancy words with precise meanings (e.g., *conspicuously*) that do not really make sense. The reader should be able to focus on your ideas without being confused by the wording.

Introduce	Continue	Conclude
First(ly) First of all To begin In the first place	Furthermore In addition Moreover	Finally To sum up (informal) To summarize

**Topic sentences** should also be kept **general** because you do not want to present too much information too soon. If you give too many details at the beginning of your paragraph, you will not have anything left over and may wander off topic trying to find things to say.

**Tip: Since you will be typing your responses, you may want to begin by writing your topic sentences. Then, you can go back and fill in the rest of your body paragraphs.**

To illustrate, let's look at our main body-paragraph points from the previous page.

II. No existing space just for seniors

**Sample topic sentence:** *First(ly), there is currently no existing space in the town designed for seniors to gather.*

III. Senior centre would benefit society, not just the elderly

**Sample topic sentence:** *Moreover, a senior centre would not just benefit the elderly.*

Notice that both of these statements directly support the main argument while remaining quite broad. As a result, there is substantial room for a writer to go into more detail in the body of each paragraph.

## Developing and Organizing Body Paragraphs

The examples or ideas in your body paragraphs should follow the order of your outline, and you should devote about 2-3 sentences to each paragraph. You should also use transitions to signal new ideas.

Let's look at our first body paragraph, which focuses on the fact that senior citizens currently lack a space to gather during the day. Our supporting points are:

- Library available, but can't talk, socialize
- Coffee shops not always good for groups; loud, may be hard for elderly people to hear

When we write these up into sentences, we get this:

**First(ly), there is currently no existing space in the town designed for seniors to gather.** [1] While the library does host some events, it cannot accommodate groups that wish to chat during the day. [2] **Coffee shops are not a reliable option either.** They do not always have room for larger groups, and background noise may prevent people who are hard of hearing from participating in a conversation.

Now let's look at a full-length sample response.

Dear Town Council Members:

Given the choice between a new elementary school and a new senior centre, I believe that the senior centre would be more beneficial to the town as a whole.

**Firstly, there is currently no existing space in the town designed for seniors to gather.** While the library does host some events, it cannot accommodate groups that wish to chat during the day. Coffee shops are not a reliable option either. They do not always have room for larger groups, and background noise may prevent people who are hard of hearing from participating in a conversation.

**Moreover, a senior centre would not just benefit the elderly.** Many families include two working adults who are unable to provide round-the-clock care for an aging relative. By giving older people a place to go during the day, a senior centre would reduce the pressure on younger people as well. In addition, dementia and other conditions associated with the elderly are less common among seniors who socialize regularly. As a result, a senior centre would provide important public health benefits.

I hope that you find these comments helpful, and I hope that you will take them into account when making your decision.

Kind Regards,  
Alice Randall

If your writing skills are solid, you may also want to include one or two references to the other option and explain why it is not as good a choice. However, if you choose to discuss both options within the same body paragraph, you must be very careful not make clear which side you support.

If we were to revise the second body paragraph to fit this structure, it might read as follows:

Moreover, a senior centre would not just benefit retirees. Many families include two working adults who are unable to provide round-the-clock care for an aging relative. By giving older people a place to go during the day, a senior centre would allow members of the “sandwich generation”\* more time to fulfil their own responsibilities. **In contrast, children already spend the day away from home, so the construction of a new elementary school would do nothing to reduce families’ stress.**

Another possibility is to discuss the opposing side in a very brief final (third) body paragraph. If you choose this structure, you should not write more than a sentence or two. Otherwise, your response risks losing focus.

If we were to add a third paragraph to our essay, it would look something like this:

Finally, please keep in mind that all of the town’s elementary schools have undergone renovations over the last decade. There is no reason to devote funds to constructing an entirely new building when a senior centre would fill a much more urgent need.

**OR:**

Finally, please consider that the number of elderly residents in the town is expected to increase substantially over the next decade, whereas the number of families with school-aged children is projected to fall. Thus, the need for a senior centre is greater.

If you do choose to add a “bonus” paragraph addressing the other option, keep it as short and straightforward as possible. It must be immediately clear to the reader why you have chosen to include the information.

\*Middle-aged adults who are responsible for both parents and children.

## Common Problem #1: Too Many Ideas

Each paragraph should have just **one main focus** that is developed across three or so sentences. You should not jump from idea to idea, and each sentence should clearly support the focus established in the topic sentence.

For example, look at the following body paragraph, from a question asking whether a company should prohibit employees from wearing products with strong scents.

[1] First, different people prefer different types of scents. Some people may like floral odors, while others may be drawn toward spicy or fruity ones. [2] In addition, some people not only dislike strong scents but may actually become ill from being exposed to them. [3] Another reason that the company should go fragrance-free is that some scented products contain harmful chemicals. [4] Finally, strong odors can “stick” to others who have not chosen to wear them.

Rather than discuss a single point in depth, the writer simply lists a series of reasons. The result is that the argument remains unfocused and the ideas underdeveloped.

## Common Problem #2: Topic Sentence and Paragraph Don't Match

Another problem arises when the body of a paragraph has a different focus from the one indicated in the topic sentence.

In the paragraph we're working with, the statement that *[D]ifferent people prefer different types of scents. Some people may like floral odors, while others may be drawn toward spicy or fruity ones* establishes a focus on the fact that people's scent preferences vary. If, however, the paragraph suddenly shifts to a different idea, the reader will become confused, as in the following paragraph.

**First, different people prefer different types of scents. Some people may like floral odors, while others may be drawn toward spicy or fruity ones.** My colleague Janice Wang in the Accounting department is allergic to many essential oils. In the middle of a recent meeting, she had a reaction to someone's perfume and had to sit in the lounge with her inhaler for nearly an hour while she waited for her symptoms to subside. Luckily, she recovered; however, her experience demonstrated that scent allergies can be quite severe.

While this story helps the writer make a strong argument for banning scents in the workplace, it is unrelated to the topic introduced at the beginning of the paragraph. There is also no transition to indicate the shift to a new idea. As a result, the essay would lose points for Coherence. Compare it to the revised version on the following page.

**First, some people not only dislike strong scents but may actually become ill from being exposed to them.** For instance, my colleague Janice Wang in the Accounting department is allergic to many essential oils. In the middle of a recent meeting, she had a reaction to someone’s perfume and had to sit in the lounge with her inhaler for nearly an hour while she waited for her symptoms to subside. Luckily, she recovered; however, her experience demonstrated that scent allergies can be quite severe.

Now the paragraph remains focused throughout.

### **Common Problem #3: Going Off-Topic**

Because CELPIP emails are so short, you should avoid wasting words on descriptions that are not directly relevant to the question. For example, consider the following excerpt from a sample complaint letter to a taxi company.

I am writing this letter to express my dissatisfaction about a recent trip with one of your taxi drivers. Several days ago, I took a trip to Butchart Gardens, **which is among the most popular attractions in Victoria. The gardens are beautifully landscaped and provide an oasis of calm and tranquility for both residents and visitors.** However, I was sorely disappointed in the service your company provided.

Regardless of how beautiful or interesting Butchart Gardens may be, they are unrelated to the purpose of the letter—that is, to lodge a complaint about the taxi company’s poor service. As a result, the bolded information is a distraction.

Another common issue involves writing about ideas that are related to the prompt but that do not directly respond to the question asked. This is a subtler problem than the ones just discussed, but it will also cost you points in Coherence.

For example, consider the following paragraph, written in response to a survey question on whether an elementary school should continue serving children foods such as pizza and hamburgers for lunch, or should switch to more healthful options.

My daughter Maya is in Grade 3, and I have heard several complaints from parents of other children in her class regarding the lunch selections provided by the school. However, I realize that parents are free to pack homemade lunches and do not need to rely on the school’s offerings. In addition, my own elementary school did not provide any kind of food, and I am extremely appreciative that this institution serves a meal to the children during the day.

While the paragraph discusses the general topic of the question and seems to imply that the writer finds the current lunches acceptable, it does not make a clear argument. **The writer refers to both positions but never directly states his or her opinion.** The result is a vague response that does not truly answer the question.

Now, notice how the revised version below presents the writer's opinion in the first sentence and then uses the rest of the paragraph to expand on that idea.

While I am aware that the lunches served by the school do not consist of tofu and organic greens, **I do not think that this is a serious cause for concern.** Pizza and hamburgers do have some nutritional value, and they give children the energy to focus during the afternoon. According to my daughter, portion sizes are small, and the main dish is usually accompanied by a fruit or vegetable as well as milk.

#### **Common Problem #4: Overuse of Transitional Words and Phrases**

Finally, while using transitions effectively is a key part of writing a high-scoring response, you should be careful not to overuse these words. For example, consider the following paragraph.

I will be relocating from Hamilton to Waterloo for a nine-month certificate program and am seeking accommodations during that time. **To begin**, a furnished condo would be ideal as my stay will be relatively short. **Moreover**, I would prefer a one-bedroom apartment with an in-suite washroom, including a bathtub. **Furthermore**, I am aware that some students rent rooms in larger houses. **Therefore**, I would be interested in that possibility as well.

Here, the writer mechanically sticks in a transition at the beginning of almost every sentence, regardless of whether it makes sense. *Moreover* and *furthermore* have the same meaning, and it is repetitive to use them one after the other. In the final sentence, *Therefore* does not introduce a result.

The revised version, in contrast, removes the unnecessary transitions and replaces the illogical one with an option that makes more sense.

I will be relocating from Hamilton to Waterloo for a nine-month certificate program and am seeking accommodations during that time. **To begin**, a furnished condo would be ideal as my stay will be relatively short. **[No transition]** I would prefer a one-bedroom apartment with an in-suite washroom, including a bathtub. **Alternatively**, I am aware that some students rent rooms in larger houses. **[No transition]** I would be interested in that possibility as well.