

FCE - Writing Articles

What makes an article different from other types of writing?

1 The reader is identified

An article is like a direct conversation with the reader. The exam question might tell you who your readers are. For example, the students at a school, or the people living in a town or people who are interested in sports. Everything you write must speak to that reader and engage their interest right from the first sentence.

2 It has to get attention

If you're anywhere on the internet these days, you'll be bombarded with articles with headlines that pull the reader in. It's called "click baiting" and all the writer is trying to do is make you open the page to read their article. You need to think like a journalist when you're writing your article. .

3 It has to be interesting

For an article to work, it has to be engaging enough to read all the way through. Remember how bored the examiner must be after reading fifty exam papers. Make it easier for them to get a good impression about your writing by entertaining them. Add humor, real life or made up examples, or make up quotes.

4 It has to be easy to read

Use subheadings to break up the text and make clear paragraphs. Write in a semi-informal, conversational style. And make sure there is organization to your ideas. The planning stage is vital for this. Spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming ideas and choose the best three or four. Think what your subheadings might be and then write a short introduction that lets the reader know what to expect.

Keep in mind that you want the reader to keep reading, so don't tell them exactly what they will read. This is not an essay! In an essay you usually restate the question, explain how you will answer it and maybe say why it's important. In an article, that will kill the reader's interest.

5 Write a good ending

In an essay you sum up the points that have gone before and draw a conclusion from that. But in an article, it's better to give the reader something to think about, perhaps by asking them another question or giving them a call to action. Often, the best endings link back to the starting point in some way.

Common mistakes students make in articles

The language is too formal and more suited to essays. Avoid words like: to sum up, some people say, nevertheless, on one hand etc.

They don't use quotes or examples

They either use not enough, or too many, questions. The questions, called rhetorical questions because they don't require an answer, shouldn't be more than one per paragraph. Good examples are:

- Have you ever
- What do you think about
- Are you one of those people who thinks that
- What would life be like if
- Will the future bring us ?

* A title which makes the subject immediately clear. For some reason, people like reading lists! And a direct, rhetorical question in the first paragraph to make readers want to find out the answer.

** I've used the imperative to give instructions. E.g. Think...Keep in mind...Write...Spend...