Cambridge English Readers

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Writers' Guide

Confidential

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1 Introduction

What are Cambridge English Readers?

Fiction for adult and young adult learners of English as a foreign or
second language, and for use in literacy programmes.

What's special about Cambridge English Readers?

The series combines the highest quality of writing and storytelling
with great sensitivity to the linguistic needs of learners. This
combination ensures a successful, enjoyable reading experience with
learners eager to finish one book and start another.

Why are they so successful?

Cambridge English Readers only contain new adult fiction written
around contemporary themes from authors who can both create
believable characters and gripping plots and make these accessible to
the learner.

How is this done?

- By writing within a genre known to the reader. The series
  contains thrillers, detective stories, ghost stories, horror, short
  stories, romance, comedy, adventure, science fiction, murder
  mystery and human interest.
- By treating the reader as an adult and dealing with themes and
  topics of contemporary relevance. The series does not fall into the
  traps of treating the learner as a child and equating a low language
  level with a low intellectual level or limited experience of life or of
  offering watered-down versions of the classics. Instead the series
  offers original, exciting fiction at the right language level.
- By making reading a pleasure through positive language control
  and information control. Learners can read *Cambridge English*

Readers easily without a dictionary and understanding is enhanced by careful contextualisation and recycling of new words. The vocabulary at each level is established by reference to corpus-based lexical research, analysis of commonly-occurring words in course materials and readers, and the Council of Europe's Waystage and Threshold levels. The grammatical grading reflects that of most CUP courses.

- By offering titles which look like 'real' books, with illustration only being used at the two lowest levels.
- By featuring international as well as UK settings with stories set in northern and southern Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America and Australasia.
- By providing high quality recordings on cassette and CD, photocopiable worksheets and a practical Teacher's Guide containing a wide range of stimulating, proven reading activities. The website (www.cambridge.org/elt/readers) offers up-to-date information on new titles and resources, sample chapters, worksheets, articles, and Teacher's Guide sections for downloading, a chance to meet the authors, competitions, reviews and a discussion forum.
- By catering for learners at all levels from elementary to advanced. The highest level provides the much requested bridge to authentic reading materials which is missing from most other series.

2   The benefits of extensive reading for the English language learner

Reading for pleasure

Described as the best-kept secret in language teaching, reading for pleasure in the language one is learning does far more than improve reading skills. The following summary of claims for reading is taken from Walker 1995 (with slight modification).

1   **Language improvement**
 a builds vocabulary
 b builds grammatical awareness
 c gives exposure to language, giving learners access to language a little ahead of their level but which can be understood

2   **Speed**
 improves the ability to read without thinking about reading, as well as enabling the learner to read faster

3   **Background knowledge**
 enhances awareness of cultural factors

4   **Comprehension**
 improves comprehension and skills for getting meaning from texts

5   **Attitude**
 promotes confidence and motivation

6   **Quantity**
 encourages learners to read more and to read whole texts rather than extracts

7   **Word attack skills**
 provides an opportunity to employ skills for getting the meaning of words (e.g. deducing the meaning of unknown words from context)

8   **Types of reading technique**
 develops flexibility of reading rate depending on the purpose (e.g. skimming for gist, or scanning for particular information)

9   **Reading practice**
 'you learn to read by reading'

10 **Transfer to other skills**
 extensive reading improves spelling, writing, speaking and listening skills

11   Learning resource

it is not dependent on others, e.g. teachers

Summarised by Walker 1995 from: Grabe 1991, Elley 1991, Nuttall 1982, Bamford 1984, Hafiz and Tudor 1989, Krashen 1993.

Reading and listening

An important dimension is added to extensive reading by the use of recordings on cassette or CD to support the text, or without the text as extensive listening. Reading and listening at the same time increases reading speed and facilitates sound/symbol correspondence. Research in New Brunswick in Canada, where primary and secondary pupils only reading and listening to books were compared with students receiving regular tuition came to this conclusion:

'After six years of an essentially comprehension-based program in ESL, the students performed as well as comparison groups of students on measures of comprehension and some measures of oral production, but not on measures of written production.'

(Lightbown P., Halter and White (forthcoming))

For extensive listening the use of 'graded texts, not necessarily authentic, will be the fastest way forward' – in other words, recordings of readers are ideal for developing listening skills.

(Ridgway T. *April 2000*)

The Teacher's Guide to Cambridge English Readers (pp8–9) contains further discussion of research into extensive reading and an excellent introduction to the field is to be found in *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* by Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford (CUP 1998).

3   Key ideas

3.1   The importance of schemas (assumptions of facts, including 'default facts' which are never mentioned – usually cultural)

Guy Cook in *ELT Journal* 51/1 defines a schema as 'a mental representation of a typical instance', and goes on: 'Schema theory suggests that people understand new experiences by activating relevant schemas in their minds'.

For learners of a language, schematic knowledge can be as important as linguistic knowledge in understanding what a text means. There are personal schemas, general ones about the world, and ones related to genre. These operate at text level and are crucial to comprehension.

3.2   Writing within a genre which is familiar to the reader

Reading is facilitated by plot structure and character type which the learner is likely to recognise. This places learners in a familiar landscape where they are more likely to be able to predict in which direction they will go. Reading within a familiar genre reduces the load of new information which the learner is processing, increasing both speed and accuracy.

3.3   Straightforward plot structure and limits on the number and roles of characters

Complex plotting (e.g. flashback) and too many characters place obstacles in the path of a language learner.

3.4   Paragraph and sentence level information control

Limiting new information for the learner in each paragraph and sentence is as important as the use of simple language. Too much new information slows the learner to a halt. Careful attention to anaphora (backward reference using pronouns e.g. *she, this*) prevents overload, avoids ambiguity and facilitates reading forward, so that readers do not have to look back to see who or what is referred to.

For these reasons the word list is a guide only. The aim of the word list is not to hamstring the writer but to ensure that the learner is not held up by too many unknown words.

In addition to words in the word list, words belonging to certain lexical sets may be used (see Appendix 1). This is not to give 'carte blanche': common sense is needed and words need to be contextualised and, at lower levels, illustrated.

4.3   Grammar

Successful reading comprehension is a factor of accessible lexis, accessible text type and context, and semantic load rather than grammatical grading. Learners' ability to comprehend goes before their ability to produce. Moreover, grammatical difficulties may well occur at the text rather than sentence level through lack of cohesion, or poor reference, for example. A further cause of difficulty may be 'grammatical lexis', e.g. phrasal verbs.

Nevertheless, the establishment of lexical levels needs complementing with grammatical levels so that the reader is not swamped by unwelcome grammatical complexity too soon. These grammatical levels will precede rather than follow the productive levels of course books, thus providing significant preview exposure.

Appendix 2 sets out a guide to the grammatical structures allowed at each level. The levels have been established in relation to 'fixed' reference points (ALTE Level 2, Threshold, PET, 350 hours = CER Level 3. ALTE Level 3, FCE = CER Level 5), to the language syllabus of CUP adult course books, to standard grammatical reference books, and to the grading of other series of readers.

The levels show which grammatical forms can be used at each level and they are cumulative so that each succeeding level includes all those below it. Just as the lexical levels are overridden by the requirements of the story, so these grammatical levels can be overridden with occasional use of forms from the level immediately above when the context is clear and the needs of the story demand it.

Writers may wish to consult the level specification before starting to write to get a feel for it, and then consult the specification again on completion of writing to check that they are on target.

5   The writing process

The demands of writing a reader for learners of English are different from those involved in writing for people whose native language is English, even though the creative process may be similar.

The notes that follow are offered as no more than a guide: if you have your own way of writing and it works, stick to it!

5.1   Before starting

Decide on your level and think of a class you know or have recently taught at that level. Use them as your reference point, not just for language, but also for content. Later, you may be able to try the material out with the actual class, or a similar one.

5.2   Getting started

'*You never quite know where your story is until you have written the first draft of it.*'   Raymond Chandler (letter: March 7, 1947)

Different writers work in different ways. While some like to map out plot and character beforehand others prefer to discover the story by writing it. The crucial thing is that you work within a genre. Although many learners are not wide readers even in their own language they are certainly aware of genre through exposure on TV, film and video. Thus they will have expectations of what will happen in, say, a thriller (a difficult situation of some kind, a protagonist who struggles against odds to resolve the situation, a restricted timeframe, exciting incidents and a gripping conclusion) and the kind of language that will be used to tell the story. By writing within genre the author greatly facilitates comprehension and increases speed of reading and enjoyment. One reason why simplified literature is

often so unsatisfactory and hard to read is that great literature often defies genre, creating its own contexts and values.

A successful way to start using genre is to move like this:

genre – character – situation – place – event

In other words, think of a genre which readers will be familiar with (either through reading or through TV and video). For example:

adventure	murder mystery	thriller	romance
travel	fantasy	science fiction	horror
comedy	human interest	detective story	ghost story

Think of a character, the kind that appears in your chosen genre. Place the character in a situation, some kind of problem or opportunity. Choose the place, the physical location. Then think of an event that the character participates in. And let the story begin . . . This way of writing is for those who want to find out what happens to the character and who write the story in order to do so. The advantage of this 'making it up as you go along' method is that you can, of course, go back and plant plot trails and introduce clues and characters when the need arises.

Another different way of writing is to produce a plot summary showing the whole book in outline in a paragraph or two, and then to write the first chapter and get feedback on it before proceeding.

Either way the cultural setting of the story is paramount. The readers do not have to have direct personal experience of the setting but must know what to expect. Thus a western/cowboy story will draw on a lot of background knowledge from TV and film westerns, while a story set in Africa in the Second World War will be much more demanding and therefore difficult.

Pastiche can be very successful. Consider taking a modern classic and writing a sequel. Short story collections are also popular.

5.3 What we are looking for

Identifiable genre: The genre within which the writer is working needs to be clearly identifiable. Combining genres causes problems. The first question a reader needs answered is: what genre is this?

Contemporary situations: While stories may spring from past events a distinguishing characteristic of the series is that it deals with contemporary issues and situations.

Adult feel: Child, animal or teenage protagonists do not give an adult feel. Nevertheless there are exceptions – see *Jojo's Story* (Level 2).

Clear sense of place: A clear setting, well described (whether overseas or UK) to give the reader the impression of having been there.

What you know: Writing from personal experience and understanding is often clearer and more effective than a massive leap of empathy. This is not to say that, for example, sci-fi or fantasy are not welcome but that the writer needs to be really familiar with those particular genres.

Strong themes: Successful fiction is 'about' something. It has themes and a depth which the pot-boiler lacks. While abstract concepts are more easily handled at higher levels the lower level reader can still treat 'serious' topics. A question to ask: 'What is it about?'

Hooks: Not confined to thrillers! By hooks we mean end-of-chapter questions in the reader's mind which make her want to start the next one.

Showing not telling: The reader needs to discover the story through dialogue and action rather than be told about it. In this respect the use of a diary as a device has drawbacks.

Character motivation: An obvious point, but character's actions must spring from their own motives rather than the exigencies of the plot. Writers report that the development of the characters' own 'voices' is vital – different writers achieve this in different ways.

Believable characters: At all levels, but particularly at the lower ones, the number of characters needs to be limited. At Level 1 four or five characters and two or three settings are enough. Characters at all levels need to be 'fleshed-out' as we observe them interact and develop through the book. A balance is needed between stereotypical characters which make for easy identification and more original ones.

Strong opening: An opening which gets the action moving rather than elaborate scene-setting and character introduction.

Good ending: A resolution to the problem or conflict which the book centres around. It is important to make an ending happen and not let the story peter away.

Linear time frame: Careful attention to time is fundamental. A linear structure (particularly at the lower levels) which avoids flash-backs and time jumps makes life easier for the reader. Parenthetically, sudden jumps in place which disorientate the reader are also to be avoided.

Cultural knowledge: We assume that where a foreign cultural setting is used this is explained or glossed. However, it is equally important to avoid UK cultural references which will cause comprehension problems.

Tension and action: It is important to keep things moving along.

Sequels: While we welcome further stories using the same protagonist if it is genre-appropriate, sequels which pre-suppose a know-ledge of the previous book will only be considered after the first book has succeeded in the market.

Natural dialogue: The use of lots of dialogue lends freshness and keeps the language natural. Ensure that speaker attribution is clear (who is speaking). Internal monologue can be seen as dialogue. The total number of words in a book with lots of dialogue is less than a book with not much dialogue, because dialogue takes up more space on the page.

Lexical control: Occasional use of essential above level (one level) words is facilitated by careful contextualisation, glossing and, most importantly repetition. If the word doesn't repeat naturally it is hardly essential!

Structural control: Occasional use of structures from the level above where really necessary is fine. More important is to avoid both the piling up of simple sentences and the use of over-complex sentences with embedded clauses. Make sure you use the grammar that is available to you.

Lexical coverage: Ensure that you know and make use of the full range of lexis available at your level. Internalising the list can be useful.

Attention to length: Write to length, keeping chapters reasonably even. Always try to be a little short of the maximum.

Imagery/metaphor: While avoiding unguessable idioms (e.g. 'They were at sixes and sevens.') use imagery to give the language vividness. The following examples are taken from Level 2, *Jojo's Story*.

'The fire in the village was different. It made a sound like the wind in the night. A great big wind which makes you hide in your bed with your blanket over your head.'

'The tears are all inside my head like a big ball of rice that won't go down.'

This example is taken from Level 3, *The Beast*:

'The rivers are like snakes.'

Appropriate artwork: Make sure that the illustrations at Levels 1 and 2 'work' by contextualising out-of-level language and conveying ideas and feelings which the linguistic constraints make difficult. A map can be included at all levels.

Interesting chapter headings: Give thought to these: lists of names, places or dates are rarely of help to the reader. The list of chapter headings on the contents page can give the prospective reader an overview and stimulate interest.

5.4   The look on the page

Processing large chunks of text is more difficult in a new language than short paragraphs. Use dialogue as much as possible.

Illustrations are an important part of the books at Levels 1 and 2. Illustration can be used imaginatively so please consider strip cartoon and speech bubbles as possibilities (without losing the adult feel). Illustrations are not expected at Levels 3–6. However, some artwork to explain background and locations, for example maps, (up to a maximum of four pages) could be included at these levels, with the agreement of the editors.

5.5   The word list and grammatical structures

Different authors work in different ways. You may wish to look through the word list and grammatical structures before writing, refer to them occasionally while writing, and check the finished product against them. Or you may prefer to have them to hand during the writing process (at least until a 'feel' for the level has developed).

Another possibility is to write without looking at the lists and then to simplify afterwards (in effect rewriting).

CUP can supply you with an electronic list by email giving a cumulative listing of all words at a particular level (thus the Level 4 list also includes words from Levels 1, 2 and 3). Manuscripts are also checked electronically at CUP and a listing of the levels of all words used supplied.

What is most important is that writers familiarise themselves with all the words available to them and do not restrict themselves unnecessarily.

5.6   Submitting a proposal

After you have familiarised yourself with the series concept, the Writers' Guide, the level specifications, and readers already in the series, you are invited to submit a proposal for the series to Cambridge University Press. (Proposals are very carefully reviewed by the in-house commissioning editor and the series editor. After the review process, the decision as to whether or not to offer a contract is made by the governing body, the Press Syndicate.) Before preparing a proposal check with the editors on genre, storyline and level. Feel free to do this by emailing brief details at an early stage. This will enable us to check that your idea doesn't overlap with another title or proposal, and to give initial feedback on suitability.

1   Choose a level, draft a story outline and submit it with specimen chapters, as follows:

    Level 1: submit whole story
    Level 2: submit outline and first half of story
    Levels 3–6: submit outline chapter by chapter and 3,000 words

2   The editors (series editor and in-house commissioning editor) will comment on proposed stories or story outlines and specimen chapters. A change of level or approach may be suggested. You may then be invited, if you wish, to submit a full typescript.

3   The editors will read and comment on the first or second draft of the full typescript, proposing changes and rewrites where necessary and giving advice on language level and length. The process of producing an EFL reader typically involves more editorial intervention than for, say, a novel.

4   The editors will read and comment on the final typescript in the same way.

Occasional writers' workshops are held where authors can meet and exchange ideas and experiences.

6   Production

6.1   Presentation of the typescript

Please provide *two* hard copies of all material, including story outlines, specimen chapters, draft and final typescripts. The typescript should be printed out single-sided and double spaced on A4 paper, with margins of at least 4 cm. Please number the pages and do not staple any sections together. Chapters should start on a new page. Please provide both a chapter-by-chapter and a total word count. When submitting a final typescript, please also supply a disk copy.

6.2   Conventions

In general please refer to the CUP English Language Teaching Style Guide, and to CIDE – the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* for spelling. However, please note the following points specific to *Cambridge English Readers*.

Numbers: Write all numbers except dates as words. Note hyphenation of eighty-year-old, seventy-two.

Spellings:

baby-sitting	car park	T-shirt
no-one	per cent	bad-tempered
sun-tanned	email	nightclub

Inverted commas: Use single inverted commas for speech and double inverted commas for quotations or anything within single inverted commas. Use double inverted commas for titles of books.

Punctuating speech: Always start a new paragraph for new speakers. Ensure punctuation is within the inverted commas. Punctuate thought in the same way as speech when it is the equivalent of direct speech.
Example:

> 'Why don't you go out and look for a job?' said Teresa.
> 'Oh no,' I thought. 'Eight o'clock in the morning and she's telling me to get a job.' I liked being a writer and I thought I was a good one.

Contractions: Use contractions where they sound natural.

Measurements: In general use metric measurements.

6.3   Prelims and endmatter

Final typescripts should include the following prelims and endmatter.
Contents: Please supply a list of the chapter headings.
Characters: Please supply a list of characters in the story and brief descriptions.
Glossary: If your story contains any cultural references or foreign words you will be asked to supply a glossary. This would usually appear at the back of the book.

6.4   Artwork brief

At Levels 1 and 2 suggestions for illustrations should be numbered consecutively in the typescript. In addition please supply a numbered list of illustrations as a separate artwork brief, describing the illustration in as much detail as possible. It often helps to

identify a character through reference to a celebrity rather than by description (e.g. 'Looks like Hugh Grant but with blue eyes'; 'Looks like Annie Lennox but quite short').

For Levels 3–6, please consult with the editors first regarding inclusion of artwork.

Illustrations (black and white) will be commissioned according to the artwork brief and during the production process, roughs will be sent to you for approval.

6.5   Recordings

Each story will be recorded, probably by a single voice, although one narrator and character voices are not ruled out. Authors may wish to submit suggestions for the voice(s) used, the style of narration and any introductory music, and will be invited to the recording where possible.

6.6   Copy-editing and proofing

Once a typescript has been contracted, revised and a final version agreed with the editors, it will go through the following stages:

1   The copy-editor (who may be in-house or freelance) will prepare the typescript for typesetting and will contact authors about any queries or suggested changes.

2   The typescript will be typeset; authors will receive first proofs to check and send on to the copy-editor. The copy-editor will collate authors' corrections and those from the proofreader, plus their own.

3   The first proofs will be corrected by the typesetter and the second proofs will be checked against the first proofs by the copy-editor.

Appendix 1

1.1   Lexical sets

Days of the week, months of the year and numbers can be used from Level 1. It is not considered helpful to grade more than a few commonly occurring words from the lexical sets listed below. However, discretion should be used regarding their inclusion at a given level. For example, although 'hat' and 'waistcoat' are both clothes, one is obviously more difficult that the other.

Level 1
countries
days of the week
jobs
months
numbers
shops
sports

Level 2 and higher
animals and insects
body
clothes
food and drink

1.2   Affixes

Level 1 and higher
-th (fourth)

Appendix 2   Grammatical structures

Level 1
Present simple   *I write books. I'm not an artist.*
Present continuous   *I'm waiting for the bus.*
Present continuous (with future reference)   *I'm leaving tomorrow.*
'going to' future   *You're going to be a rich man.*
Past simple (regular and common irregular)   *I closed my eyes and went to sleep.*
Modals: 'must', 'need' and 'can'   *It must stop.   You need a real job. You can send letters by computer.*

Verb + adverb   *Mel said quickly.*
Noun + 2 adjectives   *beautiful, rich people*
Two clause sentences with 'and', 'but', 'or'   *I took a bus and walked to the Waldorf.*

Imperative   *Wait here!*
Open questions   *Can I call you Frank?*
wh-questions   *Where was it?*
Negative   *We don't know.*

Indirect speech (no tense change)   *He said he lives in London. The TV said it's going to rain.*
Impersonal 'it'   *It's a long way from here.*
Short answers   *Yes, it is. No, you can't. Yes, they have.*
There is/There are   *There's a lot to do.*
Possessive 's'   *Somebody's husband.*
'like', 'love', 'hate' + gerund   *Steve loved surfing.*

Level 2
'will' future   *He'll come tomorrow.*
Past continuous   *She was saying goodbye.*
Present perfect   *They have just left.*
Modals: 'have to', 'could'   *I have to go.   I couldn't see anything.*

Main clause + 1 subordinate clause   *When I got near to the house I saw lots of people.*
Verb + 2 adverbs   *They drove away very slowly in the dark.*
Tag questions   *You will help me, won't you?*

Comparison: comparative and superlative of adjectives   *This room is bigger.   It was the smallest.*

Defining relative clauses: 'who', 'that', 'which'   *He is the man who lives next door.*
Conjunctions: so, because, before, after, when, then

ask/tell + infinitive   *They told me to drive slowly.*
Infinitive of purpose   *They went to the shop to get some milk.*
Gerund as subject   *Writing was hard.*

Simple indirect speech (with tense changes)   *He asked what I meant.*
Open conditional   *If you eat too much you put on weight.*

Level 3
Present perfect continuous   *What have you been doing?*
Past perfect   *She had driven from London.*
'used to'   *They used to go to Greece.*
Simple passive   *The bag was found three days later.*
Modals: 'should', 'would', 'may', 'ought', 'might'
'was/were going to'   *I was going to tell you.*
Main clause + 2 subordinate clauses   *The bullet cut through the coat but didn't hit Chapman, who shot at the same time.*

Noun + 3 adjectives   *a lovely blue silk scarf*

1st conditional   *If I go this morning, I'll come back straight after the meeting.*
2nd conditional   *I would come if you wanted.*