

Activity 1: Urban Green Spaces

Level:

CEFR C1

Time:

90-120 minutes

Resources:

- ▶ Handouts
- ▶ Smartboard

Aims:

- ▶ To be able to understand the effect choice of punctuation, grammar and vocabulary has on a text
- ▶ To raise learners' awareness of the requirements of Task 2 of the exam
- ▶ To practise working out the meaning of vocabulary

Exam task focus: Task 2

Procedure

1. Tell learners they are going to look at how punctuation, grammar and vocabulary impact a written text, and how this is assessed in the Level 2 Reading exam.
2. Set the context. Tell learners they will be discussing urban green spaces. Ask the class to name a few local examples to make sure they are clear on the concept (which can range from a huge park in the middle of a city to a small patch of grass at the end of their block of flats, or even a few trees on an otherwise concrete street), then put them in pairs and give them five minutes or so to tell their partner what their own favourite urban green space is, and why. This could be an example local to their place of learning, where they live now or somewhere they have lived in the past.
3. Give learners Handout activity 1a and explain that this is the beginning to a longer article. Write the following questions on the board and ask them to consider these points as they read it for the first time:

What do you notice about the range of:

- ▶ punctuation?
- ▶ grammar?
- ▶ vocabulary?

Note – it's important to this lesson that they don't look up any vocabulary until they reach the dedicated 'vocabulary' activity. The session has been designed to ensure learners have maximum time to give thought to the possible meaning of unknown words and phrases by the time they encounter the vocabulary activity, and also to replicate the fact that in the exam they won't be able to use a dictionary for the grammar questions. However, if you are concerned that your learners will struggle (or that they'll 'cheat' and look up vocabulary halfway through anyway), you can move the vocabulary activity to the beginning of the session instead.

4. Go through their responses as a class. Hopefully, they'll notice that:

The writer has used as wide a range of **punctuation** as they possibly could.

They have also crammed in as many **tenses and sentence structures** as possible.

Finally, the article is full of evocative **vocabulary and colloquial expressions**.

Note: Knowledge and understanding of punctuation and grammar are tested in Task 2 of the exam. Vocabulary is tested in Task 2 and Task 3.

5. Explain that, in the exam, there are batches of questions that are specifically designed to test their knowledge and understanding of each of these three areas (Qs 11-13 in Task 2 test grammar and punctuation, and Qs 14-16 in Task 2 and Qs 28-30 in Task 3 test vocabulary). We're going to start by focusing on punctuation, and the general effect this has on the reader. Ask them to highlight all the examples of punctuation they can find in the text they have just read, except for capital letters and full stops.
6. If you have a smartboard, copy and paste the answers (below) onto the board. Otherwise, copy and paste this onto a fresh handout and provide enough copies for everyone to check their own notes. Ask them to talk to their partners again and discuss why the writer has chosen to use each piece of punctuation. Some have more of a stylistic effect and others have more of a restricted grammatical function, so they don't need to spend too long on each one, but they should give some thought to the overall impact on each paragraph.

The Importance of Urban Green Spaces

Picture the scene: you're having a really bad day. You got out of bed on the wrong side, missed the bus, and when you finally got to work there wasn't even any coffee left in the staff room! Now, your boss has sent you on some fool's errand and you're lost in the middle of a bustling city, surrounded by concrete buildings and noisy, polluting cars. The air is stifling, your head is pounding, and the directions your boss gave you – scrawled onto the back of an envelope in her illegible writing – seem to bear no relation to reality whatsoever. Why couldn't she have just told you the destination so you could have looked it up on your phone? If things don't take a turn for the better in the next two minutes, you'll be tempted to scream.

And then, like an oasis in the desert... you stumble upon a lush, green park, slap bang in the middle of the city. You sit down on a convenient bench for a moment, breathe the suddenly fresh air and can't help smiling to yourself as a family of ducks waddles by. Within moments your heart rate has gone down. Your head feels clearer and you can decipher your boss's handwriting after all. The day is about to get better.

We can all relate to this feeling, but is your local park more than just a pretty space? Well, yes, as it turns out. Urban green spaces are not just attractive spots to take a break; they're essential for our well-being. Over 84% of Brits live in towns or cities*, and new initiatives aim to ensure that the many benefits of green areas are made available to them. But just what are these benefits?

* estimated figure for 2023 according to a report by IBISWorld

7. Draw their discussion to a close and get class feedback on their thoughts. You can go into as much detail as you wish here for each individual piece of punctuation, depending on the extent to which you have already covered this previously (Sussex University have an excellent

resource to help with this: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/>), but try and make sure you've covered the following general points:

Grammatically necessary punctuation

There are some punctuation marks that the writer has little control over – he or she could choose to write the sentence in an entirely different way to avoid it, but there would likely still be the need for some other punctuation instead. Things like capital letters at the beginning of sentences and full stops at the end are examples of this, although a writer can choose to vary the length of their sentences for effect. Shorter sentences usually makes a passage feel more tense but should be used sparingly as a technique as it can just look as though the writer doesn't have very good English! Apostrophes and commas are sometimes vital – apostrophes for possession and omission in contractions, as well as commas in certain places (non-defining relative clauses being a good example), and of course hyphens to join two words in certain circumstances. However, the sentence could always be written in a different way, so even these can be an indication of what the writer wants to convey in terms of style.

Overall effect

Note that the first paragraph is full of punctuation marks: lots of commas, dashes, a colon, an exclamation mark and a question mark. There are also a couple of apostrophes used for contraction. This has the effect of making the first paragraph feel hectic, mimicking the state of mind the writer is putting you, the protagonist of the story, in. The many commas make the story feel as though the action is coming thick and fast.

The second paragraph, however, has a few pieces of punctuation near the start, and almost nothing after the first line. This has the effect of slowing the pace of the narrative, once again mimicking the state of mind the writer wants the reader to experience.

The final paragraph takes more of a balanced approach. Note especially the two rhetorical questions in this last paragraph, which have the effect of drawing the reader in and making them feel almost part of a conversation – it is difficult for the brain not to try and answer a question, so it will automatically begin to take part in the narrative.

8. Now give out Handout activity 1b. These are questions which are designed to check their understanding of certain grammatical functions, similar to those they'd find in the exam. Ask them to decide individually which is the best answer.
9. Check answers as a group. Note that some of the questions are quite subtle – for example, in Q4, all of the options have contributed to your good mood that day, but at this level students are expected to fully appreciate subtleties in grammatical meaning like this. Likewise, in Q5, all the options are very close to being true, but only option B reflects the fact that these new initiatives 'aim' to accomplish these goals. The other options are past and present, not future.

Answers:

1. B
2. B
3. A
4. C
5. B

10. If you wish to extend this activity and spend a little more time focusing on the grammar of the level, you could print off Appendix 1 of the Level 2 Specifications and ask the learners to identify which key language items from the level have been used.
11. Now ask the learners to return to the text in Handout activity 1a, and this time to underline any vocabulary they don't understand, pausing for each word or phrase to imagine what it might mean. Advise them to look back at the grammar questions for clues. Questions in the exam typically say the same or a similar thing to the text in different words, with the 'wrong' answers usually only being wrong in a minor detail, so these can be a useful source of help when trying to figure out the meaning of vocabulary. They can discuss potential meanings with their partners if there is time here.
12. Give out Handout activity 1c and ask learners to find a word or phrase in the text which matches each of the definitions. Go through the answers as a class, clearing up any remaining areas of confusion (and allowing them to look words up in their own language at this stage if necessary):
 - a task that seems to have no hope of success
fool's errand
 - plan (usually made by a government or local council) to solve a problem
initiative
 - hot, making it difficult to breathe
stifling
 - walks on short legs, swaying from side to side
waddles
 - busy
bustling
 - directly in the centre
slap bang in the middle
 - accidentally come across
stumble upon
 - written in poor handwriting
scrawled
 - beautifully flourishing, with lots of healthy plants
lush
 - everything seems to go wrong and annoy you from the minute you wake up
you got out of bed on the wrong side
 - figure out the meaning of
decipher
 - unreadable
illegible

13. To round off the lesson, give out Handout activity 2 and ask them to brainstorm which topics are likely to be covered by the writer in the rest of the article. They can either do this individually or as a group of three, creating an activity which is similar to the Group Discussion section of the Speaking & Listening exam.
14. Follow this up by asking them to choose one of the 'benefits' from their plan or discussion and write a single paragraph expanding on this topic (this can be done as homework). Make sure that they follow the writer's lead and add in as wide a range of punctuation, grammatical structures and vocabulary (including typical expressions) as they can possibly manage. This will help to cement these items in their minds as well as being a good habit to get into if they are likely to take the writing exam at a later stage.
15. Focus learners' attention on the exam box at the bottom of the handout to explain how the lesson has helped to prepare them for Task 2 of the Trinity Level 2 Skills for Life Reading exam. You can use a sample Task 2 from the website to show them which questions this relates to in practice.

Handout activity 1a

The Importance of Urban Green Spaces

Picture the scene: you're having a really bad day. You got out of bed on the wrong side, missed the bus, and when you finally got to work there wasn't even any coffee left in the staff room! Now, your boss has sent you on some fool's errand and you're lost in the middle of a bustling city, surrounded by concrete buildings and noisy, polluting cars. The air is stifling, your head is pounding, and the directions your boss gave you – scrawled onto the back of an envelope in her illegible writing – seem to bear no relation to reality whatsoever. Why couldn't she have just told you the destination so you could have looked it up on your phone? If things don't take a turn for the better in the next two minutes, you'll be tempted to scream.

And then, like an oasis in the desert... you stumble upon a lush, green park, slap bang in the middle of the city. You sit down on a convenient bench for a moment, breathe the suddenly fresh air and can't help smiling to yourself as a family of ducks waddles by. Within moments your heart rate has gone down. Your head feels clearer and you can decipher your boss's handwriting after all. The day is about to get better.

We can all relate to this feeling, but is your local park more than just a pretty space? Well, yes, as it turns out. Urban green spaces are not just attractive spots to take a break; they're essential for our well-being. Over 84% of Brits live in towns or cities*, and new initiatives aim to ensure that the many benefits of green areas are made available to them. But just what are these benefits?

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Handout activity 1b

Choose the letter of the best answer for each of the following questions about the text on Handout activity 1a.

1. The 'scene' described in the article takes place in the
 - A past
 - B present
 - C future
2. The concrete buildings surround
 - A some fool
 - B you
 - C the city
3. Your boss
 - A wrote the directions to your destination down for you
 - B gave you an envelope with the instructions inside
 - C asked you to use your phone to find the destination
4. You smile because
 - A you are pleased to be able to sit down on a bench
 - B you are relieved that the air is suddenly fresher
 - C you are amused because of the ducks going past
5. New schemes
 - A are available for 84% of British residents
 - B hope to help British town and city dwellers
 - C have been started in urban areas of Britain

Handout activity 1c

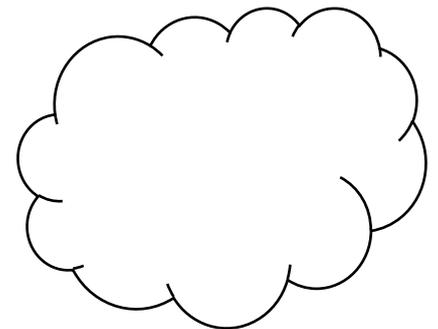
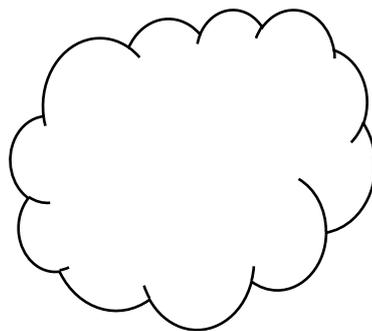
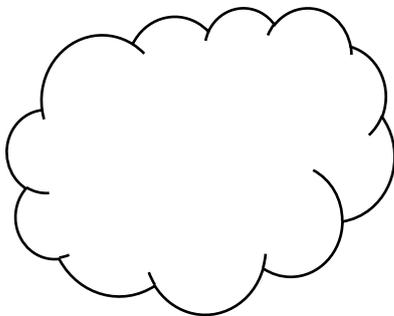
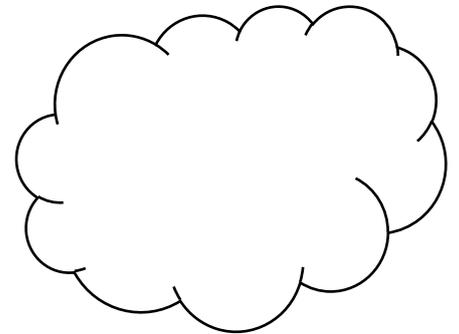
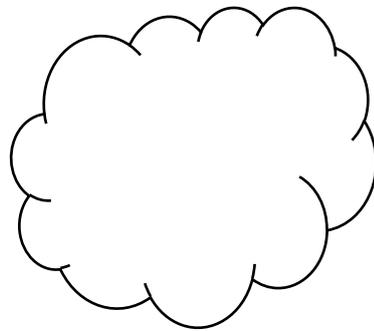
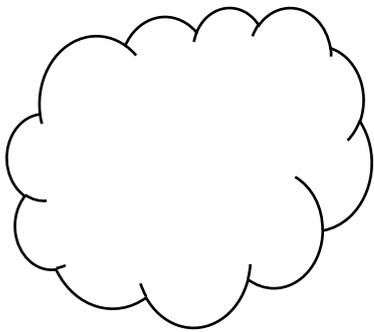
Find a word or phrase from the text that has a similar meaning to the definitions below:

- A task that seems to have no hope of success
- plan (usually made by a government or local council) to solve a problem
- hot, making it difficult to breathe
- walks on short legs, swaying from side to side
- busy
- directly in the centre
- accidentally come across
- written in poor handwriting
- beautifully flourishing, with lots of healthy plants
- everything seems to go wrong and annoy you from the minute you wake up
- figure out the meaning of
- unreadable

Handout activity 2

The extract above is only the beginning of a longer article. What kind of points might the final article cover? Use the space below to brainstorm some of the potential answers to the question posed at the end of the text.

... Over 84% of Brits live in towns or cities, and new initiatives aim to ensure that the many benefits of green areas are made available to them. **But just what are these benefits?**



Exam hint

In Task 2 of the Level 2 Skills for Life Reading exam, you have to understand how grammar and punctuation affect the meaning of a text. You also need to be able to work out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary.