

Should Higher Education Be Free?

Writing Lesson, Examples & Practice Questions

How to Write a Discursive Essay: Should Higher Education Be Free?

A discursive essay is one of the most demanding and rewarding writing tasks at C1 level. Unlike a simple opinion piece, a discursive essay requires you to present, evaluate, and critically engage with **two competing perspectives** on a complex issue before arriving at a nuanced, justified conclusion. This genre appears regularly in the Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) Writing Paper and is a cornerstone of academic and professional communication.

The question of whether higher education should be free is a genuinely contested policy debate. It touches on economics, social justice, individual responsibility, and the purpose of universities themselves. Your task is not simply to list arguments, but to **evaluate their relative merits**, acknowledge counterpoints with sophistication, and defend a position with precision and intellectual confidence.

Real-life contexts where this writing style matters:

- University application essays and academic writing assignments
- Op-ed columns and letters to the editor in quality newspapers
- Policy briefings and think-tank position papers
- Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) Writing Paper, Part 1 or Part 2

Essential Writing Rules & Sentence Structure

1. Thesis-Driven Structure

A C1 discursive essay must open with a **clear, sophisticated thesis** — a statement that signals your overall evaluative position without resorting to vague generalisations. Avoid opening with: *"In this essay, I will discuss both sides."* Instead, frame your position immediately with intellectual authority.

2. Complex Sentence Architecture

C1 writing demands a variety of sentence types. You should combine:

- **Non-finite participle clauses:** *"Having considered the financial implications, one must acknowledge..."*
- **Inversion for emphasis:** *"Seldom has access to higher education been so fiercely debated."*
- **Cleft sentences:** *"What remains incontrovertible is that tuition costs deter talented students from lower-income backgrounds."*
- **Nominalisation:** Replace verb-heavy phrases with noun forms: instead of *"when the government decided to cut funding"*, write *"the government's decision to curtail funding."*

3. Register Consistency

Maintain a **formal, impersonal academic register** throughout. This means:

- Avoiding contractions (*don't* → *do not*; *it's* → *it is*)
- Avoiding colloquial expressions ("*loads of students*" → "*a significant proportion of students*")
- Using passive constructions: "*It is widely contended that...*", "*The evidence suggests...*"

4. Paragraph Architecture

Each body paragraph must follow a clear internal logic:

- **Topic sentence** — state the argument clearly
- **Elaboration** — expand and contextualise
- **Evidence or example** — substantiate with specific detail
- **Evaluation or concession** — critically assess or acknowledge a limitation

5. Punctuation at C1 Level

- Use a **semicolon** between two closely related independent clauses: "*Tuition fees generate essential revenue; without them, universities would face severe underfunding.*"
- Use **commas after sentence adverbs and discourse markers**: "*Notwithstanding this, the counterargument merits careful consideration.*"
- Use **dashes for parenthetical elaboration**: "*The Nordic model — frequently cited as evidence of success — operates within an entirely distinct fiscal context.*"

Useful Linking Words (Connectors)

Connector	Function / Use	Example Sentence
Notwithstanding	Formal contrast / concession (despite this)	Notwithstanding the economic burden this would impose, the social benefits are considerable.
Albeit	Concessive qualification (even though / though)	The policy has proven effective, albeit only in countries with robust taxation systems.
Inasmuch as	Cause / extent (to the degree that)	Free education is equitable inasmuch as it removes financial barriers for disadvantaged students.
In light of	Reason / evidence-based justification	In light of the prevailing evidence, a means-tested approach appears most pragmatic.
Be that as it may	Concession followed by counter-assertion	Be that as it may, the long-term economic returns of a graduate workforce are undeniable.
On the premise that	Conditional reasoning / logical foundation	Proponents argue, on the premise that education is a public good, that it should be state-funded.
To substantiate this contention	Introducing supporting evidence	To substantiate this contention, one need only examine the German higher education model.

Connector	Function / Use	Example Sentence
In spite of the foregoing	Formal contrast after prior argument	In spite of the foregoing, a wholly free system risks prioritising quantity over academic quality.
Upon rigorous evaluation	Concluding analytical phrase	Upon rigorous evaluation, neither extreme position proves entirely tenable.
What remains incontrovertible is	Cleft sentence for emphatic conclusion	What remains incontrovertible is that the current system perpetuates socioeconomic inequality.
A compelling case can be made for	Measured advocacy / qualified support	A compelling case can be made for a hybrid model combining public subsidies with income-contingent loans.
Seldom has	Formal inversion for rhetorical emphasis	Seldom has the question of educational funding provoked such fierce political controversy.

Model Writing Sample: Should Higher Education Be Free?

The following model essay has been written to Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) standard: 220–260 words, formal academic register, complex syntax, and nuanced argumentation. Read it carefully before studying the annotated breakdown below.

Seldom has the question of university funding provoked such fierce and consequential debate. While proponents of free higher education argue that universal access is a matter of social justice, critics contend that the fiscal burden would ultimately undermine the quality of the very institutions it seeks to democratise.

Those who advocate for the abolition of tuition fees present a persuasive case rooted in equity. Inasmuch as socioeconomic background continues to dictate educational opportunity, a free system would dismantle the financial barriers that deter talented individuals from lower-income households. To substantiate this contention, one need only examine the German model, where the elimination of federal tuition fees precipitated a measurable increase in enrolment among first-generation students.

Notwithstanding this, the counterargument merits equally serious consideration. The implementation of a fully subsidised system would necessitate substantial reallocation of public funds — resources presently committed to healthcare, infrastructure, and social welfare. Furthermore, evidence from Nordic nations, albeit compelling on the surface, operates within a distinct fiscal architecture that few comparable economies could credibly replicate.

Having weighed the contradictory evidence, one must conclude that an absolutist position — whether advocating complete abolition or unrestricted commercialisation of tuition — fails to account for the complexities of modern economies. What remains incontrovertible is that the current trajectory of escalating fees perpetuates inequality. A compelling case can be made for a rigorously means-tested, income-contingent funding model that balances institutional sustainability with genuine social mobility.

Word Count: 238 words

Annotated Breakdown of the Model Essay

✂ Paragraph 1 — Introduction & Thesis (Lines 1–2)

Opens with a formal inversion ("*Seldom has...*") for rhetorical effect. Immediately introduces **two competing positions** without personal bias. The thesis is implicit but clear: the debate is more complex than either extreme suggests. *Note: No first-person opinion is stated here — this is deliberate at C1 level to maintain academic distance.*

✂ Paragraph 2 — Argument FOR Free Education (Lines 3–6)

Uses "*Inasmuch as*" for causal reasoning. Introduces a specific, credible real-world example (the German model) to **substantiate the claim** rather than simply asserting it. The nominalisation "*the elimination of federal tuition fees precipitated...*" replaces a weaker verb structure.

✂ Paragraph 3 — Argument AGAINST / Counterpoint (Lines 7–10)

Opens with "*Notwithstanding this*" — a sophisticated discourse marker signalling concession and contrast. Uses a parenthetical dash construction for elaboration. Acknowledges the Nordic evidence but qualifies it critically with "*albeit compelling on the surface*" — a key C1 technique of **conceding without capitulating**.

✂ Paragraph 4 — Evaluative Conclusion (Lines 11–15)

Opens with a non-finite participle clause ("*Having weighed the contradictory evidence...*"). Uses a cleft sentence ("*What remains incontrovertible is...*") for emphatic focus. Ends with a **nuanced, qualified recommendation** — the hallmark of a top-band C1 conclusion.

Key Phrases & Sentence Starters

Introducing the Topic & Framing the Debate

- *Seldom has [topic] provoked such fierce and consequential debate.*
- *The question of whether [X] remains one of the most contested issues in contemporary [field].*
- *It is widely contended that [position], yet closer scrutiny reveals considerable complexity.*
- *Few policy questions are as politically charged as that of [topic].*
- *At the heart of this debate lies a fundamental tension between [value A] and [value B].*

Presenting Arguments & Evidence

- *Proponents of this view argue, on the premise that [reason], that...*
- *To substantiate this contention, one need only examine [example/evidence].*
- *In light of the prevailing evidence, it appears that...*
- *The [country/study/data] serves as compelling evidence that...*
- *It is purported that [claim], a proposition supported by [evidence].*
- *The rapid [noun] of [policy] has resulted in [consequence].*

Contrasting, Conceding & Qualifying Points

- *Notwithstanding this, the counterargument merits equally serious consideration.*
- *While this may superficially appear sound, closer scrutiny reveals...*
- *Be that as it may, the long-term implications cannot be dismissed.*

- *Albeit persuasive in isolation, this argument fails to account for...*
- *In spite of the foregoing, a wholly [adjective] approach risks...*
- *Critics, however, rightly draw attention to the [problem/limitation] of...*

Concluding & Recommending

- *Having weighed the contradictory evidence, one must conclude that...*
- *Upon rigorous evaluation, neither extreme position proves entirely tenable.*
- *What remains incontrovertible is that [key conclusion].*
- *A compelling case can be made for [nuanced/hybrid position].*
- *All things considered, the most pragmatic course of action would be to...*
- *To recapitulate, the evidence points overwhelmingly towards [conclusion].*

Common Writing Mistakes to Avoid

Mistake 1: Comma Splice (Two Independent Clauses Joined Only by a Comma)

✗ Free education benefits society, it removes financial barriers for disadvantaged students.

✓ **Free education benefits society; it removes financial barriers for disadvantaged students.**

Use a semicolon, a full stop, or a coordinating conjunction (and, but, yet) between two independent clauses. A comma alone is insufficient.

Mistake 2: Colloquial Register in a Formal Essay

✗ Loads of students can't afford university, so it's a big problem for lots of people.

✓ **A significant proportion of prospective students are unable to meet the financial demands of higher education, a situation that perpetuates socioeconomic inequality.**

Avoid contractions, informal quantifiers (loads of, lots of, a ton of), and vague language in academic writing. Replace with precise, formal alternatives.

Mistake 3: Confusing 'Despite' and 'In Spite Of' with 'Although'

✗ Despite the evidence is compelling, critics remain unconvinced.

✓ **Despite the compelling evidence, critics remain unconvinced.**

'Despite' and 'in spite of' must be followed by a noun phrase or a gerund (-ing form), not a full clause with a subject and verb. Use 'although' or 'even though' when introducing a full clause: "Although the evidence is compelling, critics remain unconvinced."

Mistake 4: Missing Comma After a Sentence-Initial Discourse Marker

✗ Notwithstanding the fiscal implications the social benefits are considerable.

✓ **Notwithstanding the fiscal implications, the social benefits are considerable.**

Always place a comma after a sentence-initial adverbial phrase or discourse marker (Notwithstanding, Furthermore, However, In light of this, Having considered...). This is a consistent C1 punctuation requirement.

Mistake 5: Weak, Vague Conclusion That Merely Summarises

✗ In conclusion, I have discussed both sides and I think free education is good in some ways but not in others.

✓ **Upon rigorous evaluation, a blanket policy of free tertiary education — however ideologically**

appealing — risks fiscal unsustainability; a rigorously means-tested, income-contingent model represents a far more equitable and pragmatic solution.

A C1 conclusion must do more than summarise — it must deliver a reasoned, qualified verdict that synthesises the arguments and signals a clear, intellectually mature position.

Writing Checklist & Practice Task

C1 Discursive Essay Writing Checklist

Checklist Item	✓ / ✗
My introduction frames the debate and implies a thesis without merely stating "I will discuss both sides."	
I have presented at least two distinct arguments (one per body paragraph) with supporting evidence or examples.	
I have used at least one inversion, cleft sentence, or non-finite participle clause for stylistic variety.	
I have used nominalisation to elevate register (e.g. "the implementation of" rather than "when they implemented").	
My concessions are genuinely evaluative — I acknowledge limitations without abandoning my overall argument.	
I have used a range of sophisticated discourse markers (Notwithstanding, Albeit, Inasmuch as, Be that as it may).	
My register is consistently formal — no contractions, colloquialisms, or vague quantifiers.	
Commas follow all sentence-initial discourse markers and adverbial phrases.	
I have used semicolons correctly between independent clauses where appropriate.	
My conclusion offers a nuanced, qualified verdict — not a mere summary of what has already been stated.	
My essay is between 220–260 words (Cambridge C1 Advanced target length).	

Practice Writing Task

Your university's student magazine has invited readers to submit a discursive essay on the following question:

"Higher education should be fully funded by the state, with no tuition fees for students. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view?"

Write your discursive essay for the student magazine in **220–260 words**. In your essay, you should:

- Introduce the debate with a clear framing thesis

- Present and evaluate arguments in favour of state-funded higher education
- Present and critically evaluate the arguments against this position
- Arrive at a nuanced, reasoned conclusion that justifies your overall position
- Use a range of sophisticated vocabulary, discourse markers, and sentence structures appropriate to C1 level

Before you write: Spend five minutes planning your paragraph structure, selecting your strongest arguments, and choosing two or three advanced discourse markers you will use deliberately.

Now test your writing mechanics and sentence skills in the exercises below.

Should Higher Education Be Free? – Practice Test

C1 | Practice Exercises: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap, Fill-in-the-Blank, Matrix Matching & Sorting

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 Which sentence demonstrates correct use of inversion to argue in favour of free higher education?

- A** Seldom has the case for free higher education been argued so persuasively as it is today.
- B** Seldom the case for free higher education has been argued so persuasively as it is today.
- C** The case for free higher education seldom has been argued so persuasively as today.
- D** Has seldom the case for free higher education been argued so persuasively today.

2 Which sentence correctly uses a non-finite participle clause in a discursive essay about university tuition fees?

- A** When we have weighed the contradictory evidence, it must be concluded that abolishing tuition fees is economically viable.
- B** Having weighed the contradictory evidence, one must conclude that abolishing tuition fees is economically viable.
- C** Weighing the contradictory evidence has been done, and one must conclude that abolishing tuition fees is viable.
- D** After to weigh the contradictory evidence, one must conclude that abolishing tuition fees is economically viable.

3 Select the sentence with correct punctuation of a parenthetical clause in a formal essay on free higher education.

- A** The abolition of tuition fees, while superficially appealing, would place an unsustainable burden on public finances.
- B** The abolition of tuition fees while superficially appealing, would place an unsustainable burden on public finances.
- C** The abolition of tuition fees, while superficially appealing would place an unsustainable burden on public finances.
- D** The abolition of tuition fees while, superficially appealing, would place an unsustainable burden on public finances.

4 Which option correctly completes this cleft sentence for a C1 essay? '_____ the chronic underfunding of state universities that has precipitated the current accessibility crisis.'

- A** What it is
- B** It is
- C** It was
- D** That was

5 Which sentence uses nominalisation most effectively in an academic argument about the financial impact of free university education?

- A** When they rapidly implemented the policy of making universities free, it disrupted the economy significantly.
- B** The rapid implementation of a free-university policy caused significant economic disruption.
- C** They rapidly implemented the free university policy and the economy was very disrupted.
- D** Making universities free was done rapidly and this made the economy get disrupted.

6 Which sentence contains the most precise and idiomatic collocation at C1 level in the context of a university fees debate?

- A** The government's proposal to abolish tuition fees has sparked considerable controversy among economists and policymakers.
- B** The government's proposal to abolish tuition fees has made considerable controversy among economists and policymakers.
- C** The government's proposal to abolish tuition fees has done considerable controversy among economists and policymakers.
- D** The government's proposal to abolish tuition fees has brought considerable controversy among economists and policymakers.

7 Which sentence correctly uses a semicolon between two independent clauses in a C1 discursive essay?

- A** Free higher education may widen social mobility; however, its fiscal sustainability remains deeply contested.
- B** Free higher education may widen social mobility, however its fiscal sustainability remains deeply contested.
- C** Free higher education may widen social mobility; However, its fiscal sustainability remains deeply contested.
- D** Free higher education may widen social mobility however; its fiscal sustainability remains deeply contested.

- 8** Which nuanced discourse marker best completes this sentence in a formal essay? '_____ the economic advantages of free tuition, critics highlight the risk of diminished institutional quality.'
- A** Even so
 - B** Notwithstanding
 - C** Inasmuch as
 - D** On the premise that

- 9** Which sentence contains an error in the use of the passive reporting verb construction appropriate to C1 academic writing about university funding?
- A** It is widely contended that the full subsidisation of higher education would reduce social inequality.
 - B** The full subsidisation of higher education is purported to reduce social inequality significantly.
 - C** It has widely been contended that the full subsidisation of higher education reduces social inequality.
 - D** It is widely contended that the full subsidisation of higher education is reducing social inequality.

- 10** Which concluding sentence is most appropriate in register and cohesion for a C1 essay arguing that higher education should be free?
- A** So basically, free university is a good idea and the government should just do it already.
 - B** Upon rigorous evaluation, a compelling case can be made for the full subsidisation of higher education, given its far-reaching implications for social equity and national productivity.
 - C** In conclusion, free university is really important and lots of people would benefit from it in many ways.
 - D** All in all, making university free seems like it could work out and be good for society.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

- 11** Proponents of free higher education argue that universal access would reduce inequality; ____, critics contend that the financial burden on the state would ultimately prove unsustainable.
- A** nonetheless
 - B** therefore
 - C** similarly

- 12** ____ the compelling moral case for free tuition, the sheer scale of public expenditure required cannot be overlooked.
- A** Notwithstanding
 - B** Inasmuch as
 - C** Provided that

13 Higher education delivers profound societal benefits; ____, it seems reasonable to argue that funding responsibility should be shared between the individual and the state.

- A** on that basis
- B** in contrast
- C** even so

14 What remains incontrovertible is that graduates, ____ benefiting from enhanced earning potential, should contribute proportionally to the cost of their education.

- A** having
- B** despite
- C** while

15 Several Nordic nations have implemented tuition-free models successfully; ____, direct comparisons with larger, more economically diverse countries should be approached with considerable caution.

- A** that said
- B** as a result
- C** in addition

16 Seldom ____ the link between educational attainment and long-term economic productivity been more rigorously documented than in recent decades.

- A** has
- B** have
- C** had

17 It was the persistent underfunding of universities, ____ the absence of student ambition, that led to declining graduate outcomes in the region.

- A** rather than
- B** in spite of
- C** along with

18 Free higher education, ____ implemented without robust quality assurance mechanisms, risks producing graduates ill-equipped to meet the demands of a competitive labour market.

- A** if
- B** once
- C** unless

19 In light of the prevailing evidence, a compelling case can be made for a graduated contribution model; ____, this approach must be designed with stringent safeguards to protect lower-income graduates.

- A** albeit
- B** however
- C** consequently

20 ____ one examines the debate surrounding free higher education, the tension between individual aspiration and collective fiscal responsibility emerges as the central, unresolved challenge.

- A** However closely
- B** Inasmuch as
- C** Be that as it may

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

21 Having weighed the contradictory evidence on both sides, one must acknowledge that the complete _____ of tuition fees would place an enormous burden on public finances.

22 Seldom has the debate surrounding access to university education sparked such widespread _____ among policymakers and academics alike.

23 Notwithstanding the financial _____ for the state, proponents argue that free higher education would yield significant long-term societal benefits.

24 It is widely _____ that governments in lower-income countries simply cannot afford to subsidise tertiary education for all citizens.

25 What remains _____ is that equal access to quality education is a fundamental pillar of a fair and democratic society.

26 Critics cast serious _____ upon the sustainability of fully state-funded university systems, citing the precedent of rapidly rising enrolment numbers.

27 In light of the _____ evidence from Nordic countries, it appears that free tuition alone does not guarantee equitable graduate outcomes.

28 The rapid _____ of fee-free policies without adequate infrastructure was cited as the primary cause of the subsequent decline in educational quality.

29 A compelling case can be made _____ restructuring student loan systems rather than eliminating tuition fees altogether, inasmuch as this would protect institutional funding.

30 Be that as it _____, the moral argument that financial background should never determine one's access to higher education continues to resonate powerfully with the public.

Part 4: Matrix / Match Values (Questions 31–40)

31 Match each advanced vocabulary word on the left with its correct meaning in the context of writing about higher education funding.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- | | |
|--|--|
| A To increase rapidly in number or extent | B To cause something to continue indefinitely, especially something undesirable |
| C To make an existing problem significantly worse | D To reduce the severity or burden of a difficulty |

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Exacerbate	[]
Perpetuate	[]
Alleviate	[]
Proliferate	[]

32 Match each C1 discourse marker on the left with its correct communicative function on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- | | |
|--|--|
| A To acknowledge a point while contrasting it with an opposing argument | B To accept a point but signal that it does not change the overall conclusion |
| C To introduce a reason or justification for a preceding claim | |

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Notwithstanding	[]
Inasmuch as	[]
Be that as it may	[]

33 Match each sentence opening on the left with the correct rhetorical technique it exemplifies on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Non-finite participle clause **B** Cleft sentence for focus
- C** Inversion for emphasis

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Seldom has the case for equitable access to knowledge been so compellingly argued.	[]
What remains incontrovertible is that financial barriers disproportionately disadvantage lower-income students.	[]
Having examined both the fiscal constraints and the societal benefits, one must conclude that reform is overdue.	[]

34 Match each writing genre on the left with its defining stylistic feature on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Diplomatic advocacy and polite refutation of a published argument
 - B** Impersonal academic stance with heavy nominalisation and evidence synthesis
 - C** Distinct sub-headings with persuasive yet objective modal language
 - D** Nuanced evaluative lexis assessing thematic and socio-cultural significance

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Formal Proposal	[]
Analytical Report	[]
Letter to the Editor	[]
Critical Review	[]

- 35** Match each sentence half on the left with the correct completion on the right to form a coherent C1-level argument about free higher education.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** that prompted policymakers to reconsider the existing funding framework.
- B** can governments realistically commit to abolishing tuition fees.
- C** the sustainability of such a model remains a subject of considerable debate.

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
While free tuition would undoubtedly widen participation,	[]
It was the escalating burden of student debt	[]
Not until alternative revenue streams are identified	[]

- 36** Match each C1 collocation on the left with the context in which it is most precisely used on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** To cause severe and widespread disruption to a system or institution
- B** To initiate intense public or academic disagreement
- C** To undermine the credibility of an opposing argument or data set
- D** To apply sustained pressure or effect on a decision or outcome

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Cast doubt upon	[]
Spark controversy	[]
Exert influence	[]
Wreak havoc	[]

- 37** Match each nominalised phrase on the left with the informal equivalent it replaces on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Making things much fairer for poorer people
- B** The fact that disadvantaged people are often left out
- C** When they quickly made tuition free

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
The rapid implementation of free tuition policies	[]
A significant reduction in socioeconomic inequality	[]
The consistent underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups	[]

- 38** Match each writing function on the left with the most appropriate C1 sentence on the right, in the context of an essay arguing for free higher education.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** While this objection carries a degree of merit, closer scrutiny reveals that Nordic nations have successfully maintained such systems.
- B** Critics contend, not without justification, that the financial burden of universal provision would prove unsustainable.
- C** Upon rigorous evaluation, a compelling case can be made for the phased introduction of tuition-free higher education.

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Introducing a counterargument	[]
Refuting a counterargument	[]
Stating the essay's conclusion	[]

- 39** Match each formal proposal sub-heading on the left with the type of content it should contain on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Specific, practical steps for government bodies to implement a free higher education model
- B** An overview of the current situation and the rationale for proposing changes to higher education funding
- C** An analysis of existing obstacles such as tuition fee structures and access inequality
- D** A forward-looking evaluation of anticipated social and economic outcomes of the proposed reform

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Purpose and Background	[]
Assessment of Current Impediments	[]
Actionable Recommendations	[]
Projected Long-Term Benefits	[]

40 Match each passive reporting structure on the left with the argumentative purpose it serves on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** To report research claims while maintaining a degree of critical distance
- B** To present a broadly held position without attributing it to a specific source
- C** To introduce a policy suggestion in an impersonal, objective manner

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
It is widely contended that higher education should be treated as a public good.	[]
The findings are purported to demonstrate a correlation between graduate debt and reduced social mobility.	[]
It has been proposed that a graduate tax could serve as a viable alternative to tuition fees.	[]

Part 5: Sort the Values (Questions 41–50)

41 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

controversy. university widespread question funding sparked Seldom such has

the of

42 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

incontrovertible immeasurable education benefits society. remains confers higher

What that upon is

43 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

Notwithstanding significantly socioeconomic inequality. proponents financial tuition

burden state, reduce argue would that free the the on

44 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

commodification

fundamental

undermines

contended

education

purpose.

widely

that

the

its

It

is

of

45 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

contradictory

market-driven

untenable.

evidence,

conclude

approach

weighed

Having

purely

must

that

the

one

is

a

46 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

comprehensive

equitable

prompted

tuition

policy.

access

reform

calls

lack

that

was

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for

It

of

of

a

47 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

prevailing

compelling

evidence,

abolition

gradual

tuition

light

fees.

case

made

the

can

for

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In

of

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of

a

48 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

implementation

unsustainable

inevitably

education

finances.

Critics,

however,

contend

higher

strain

public

would

place

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free

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an

on

49 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

state-subsidised

exhausted

committee

seriously

consider

avenues

private

funding

model.

until

been

Not

all

had

did

the

of

a

50 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

responsibility considered, surrounding evaluation education justice. demands
nuanced things debate higher fiscal social free both All the and of
a

Answer Key & Explanations

Should Higher Education Be Free? | C1

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **A** Correct Answer: **Seldom has the case for free higher education been argued so persuasively as it is today.**

✓ **Explanation:** When a sentence begins with a negative adverbial such as **Seldom**, the subject and auxiliary verb must be **inverted**. The correct structure is *Seldom + auxiliary verb + subject + main verb*, as in *Seldom has the case ... been argued*. The other options violate this inversion rule or misplace the auxiliary verb.
2. **B** Correct Answer: **Having weighed the contradictory evidence, one must conclude that abolishing tuition fees is economically viable.**

✓ **Explanation:** The construction **Having + past participle** forms a **perfect participle clause** indicating a completed prior action. This is a hallmark of C1 academic writing. *Having weighed the contradictory evidence* correctly precedes the main clause and shares its subject (*one*). The phrase *after to weigh* is ungrammatical, and the other options lack stylistic precision.
3. **A** Correct Answer: **The abolition of tuition fees, while superficially appealing, would place an unsustainable burden on public finances.**

✓ **Explanation:** A **parenthetical clause** must be enclosed by **matching commas** on both sides. The phrase *while superficially appealing* is a concessive parenthetical insert and requires a comma before *while* and after *appealing*. The other options either omit one comma or misplace it, disrupting the grammatical boundary of the parenthetical.
4. **C** Correct Answer: **It was**

✓ **Explanation:** This is a **cleft sentence** used to add emphasis and focus, a key C1 stylistic device. The structure is *It was + noun phrase + that + clause*. Since *precipitated* is in the past tense, **It was** is the correct form. *It is* would require a present-tense verb, *What it is* is a pseudo-cleft construction requiring different syntax, and *That was* does not form a grammatical cleft.
5. **B** Correct Answer: **The rapid implementation of a free-university policy caused significant economic disruption.**

✓ **Explanation:** **Nominalisation** is the process of converting verbs and adjectives into nouns, creating a formal, impersonal academic register. *Implementation* (from *implement*) and *disruption* (from *disrupt*) are nominalisations that elevate the register to C1 level. The other options retain informal verbal or adjectival structures unsuitable for academic writing.
6. **A** Correct Answer: **The government's proposal to abolish tuition fees has sparked considerable controversy among economists and policymakers.**

✓ **Explanation:** The correct C1 collocation is **spark controversy**, meaning to ignite or trigger a heated debate. *Make controversy*, *do controversy*, and *bring controversy* are all unidiomatic collocations that a proficient C1 writer must avoid. Collocational precision is a core competency tested at this level.

7. **A** **Correct Answer: Free higher education may widen social mobility; however, its fiscal sustainability remains deeply contested.**
 ✓ **Explanation:** When **however** is used as a conjunctive adverb linking two independent clauses, it must be preceded by a **semicolon** and followed by a **comma**. Option B incorrectly uses only a comma before *however*, creating a comma splice. Option C incorrectly capitalises *However* after a semicolon. Option D misplaces the semicolon after *however*.
8. **B** **Correct Answer: Notwithstanding**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Notwithstanding** is a formal preposition and discourse marker meaning *in spite of* or *despite*. It is used here to acknowledge a competing point before introducing a counter-argument, which is a core C1 discursive strategy. *Even so* typically follows a concession at the start of a new clause. *Inasmuch as* expresses reason or degree. *On the premise that* introduces a conditional assumption. None of these fit the grammatical and semantic context as precisely as *Notwithstanding*.
9. **D** **Correct Answer: It is widely contended that the full subsidisation of higher education is reducing social inequality.**
 ✓ **Explanation:** The error lies in using the **present continuous** (*is reducing*) after a passive reporting verb. When **it is contended that** introduces a general academic claim or debated proposition, a **simple present** (*reduces*) or conditional form is standard. The present continuous implies an action currently in progress, which is inappropriate and unidiomatic in this academic reporting context.
10. **B** **Correct Answer: Upon rigorous evaluation, a compelling case can be made for the full subsidisation of higher education, given its far-reaching implications for social equity and national productivity.**
 ✓ **Explanation:** This sentence demonstrates multiple C1 writing features: the formal discourse marker **Upon rigorous evaluation**, the passive modal construction *a compelling case can be made for*, the nominalisation *subsidisation*, and precise academic lexis such as *far-reaching implications* and *social equity*. The other options use colloquial language (*basically, just do it, really important, work out*) that undermines formal academic register.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** **Correct Answer: nonetheless**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Nonetheless** introduces a **contrasting viewpoint** after conceding a point, making the logical opposition between the two clauses coherent. *The policy seems attractive; nonetheless, its long-term costs remain contentious.*
12. **A** **Correct Answer: Notwithstanding**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Notwithstanding** is a formal concessive preposition meaning 'in spite of', suitable for acknowledging a strong argument before introducing a counterpoint. *Notwithstanding its merits, the proposal raises serious fiscal concerns.*
13. **A** **Correct Answer: on that basis**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **On that basis** signals a **logical conclusion drawn from the preceding premise**, linking the societal benefit stated first to the policy recommendation that follows. *The evidence is persuasive; on that basis, reform is justified.*

14. **A** Correct Answer: having
✓ Explanation: **Having** introduces a **non-finite perfect participle clause**, indicating a completed condition that informs the main clause. *Having benefiting from enhanced earning potential* establishes the causal rationale for the subsequent argument.
15. **A** Correct Answer: that said
✓ Explanation: **That said** is a formal discourse marker used to **qualify or moderate the preceding statement** before introducing a nuanced counterpoint. *The model works in Scandinavia; that said, replication elsewhere is far from straightforward.*
16. **A** Correct Answer: has
✓ Explanation: When **Seldom** opens a sentence, **subject-auxiliary inversion** is required. The subject '*the link*' is singular, so the correct auxiliary is **has**. *Seldom has such compelling evidence been presented to policymakers.*
17. **A** Correct Answer: rather than
✓ Explanation: **Rather than** within a cleft sentence structure precisely **excludes one cause in favour of another**, adding analytical precision. *It was policy failure, rather than student apathy, that caused the decline.*
18. **A** Correct Answer: if
✓ Explanation: **If** introduces a **conditional clause** specifying the circumstances under which the risk materialises. *If implemented carelessly, even well-intentioned policies can yield poor outcomes.*
19. **A** Correct Answer: however
✓ Explanation: **However** signals a **formal adversative contrast**, acknowledging the proposed model while introducing a critical qualification. *A graduated model is appealing; however, equity safeguards are essential.*
20. **A** Correct Answer: However closely
✓ Explanation: **However closely** introduces a **concessive adverbial clause of degree**, meaning 'no matter how closely', which frames the overarching analytical challenge of the essay. *However closely one analyses the data, a definitive conclusion proves elusive.*

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **abolition** Correct Answer: abolition
✓ Explanation: **Abolition** is a formal **nominalisation** meaning the complete removal or elimination of something. *The abolition of fees was a central policy proposal.* It collocates naturally with *of tuition fees* at C1 level.
22. **controversy** Correct Answer: controversy
✓ Explanation: The collocation **spark controversy** is a precise C1-level phrase meaning to provoke heated public disagreement. *The proposal sparked enormous controversy in parliament.* Other verbs like *cause* are less idiomatic here.

23. **implications** **Correct Answer: implications**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Implications** collocates strongly with *financial* in formal academic writing, referring to consequences or effects. *The financial implications of the reform were far-reaching.* This reflects C1 nominalisation skills.
24. **contended** **Correct Answer: contended**
 ✓ **Explanation:** The passive reporting verb **it is widely contended** is a hallmark of C1 academic register, used to attribute a viewpoint to a broad group without specifying who. *It is widely contended that inequality begins in early education.*
25. **incontrovertible** **Correct Answer: incontrovertible**
 ✓ **Explanation:** The cleft sentence structure **What remains incontrovertible is that...** is a sophisticated C1 device for emphasis. *Incontrovertible* means impossible to dispute, conveying a strong academic assertion. *The evidence was incontrovertible.*
26. **doubt** **Correct Answer: doubt**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Cast doubt upon** is a precise C1 collocation meaning to cause something to seem uncertain or questionable. *The new data cast serious doubt upon the earlier findings.* Using *raise* or *put* would be less collocationally accurate here.
27. **prevailing** **Correct Answer: prevailing**
 ✓ **Explanation:** The fixed phrase **in light of the prevailing evidence** is a formal C1 discourse marker used to introduce a conclusion grounded in current research. *Prevailing* means most widespread or dominant at a given time. *The prevailing view shifted considerably.*
28. **implementation** **Correct Answer: implementation**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Implementation** is a key C1 nominalisation, transforming the verb *implement* into a formal noun suitable for academic and report writing. *The implementation of the strategy required careful planning.* It collocates with *rapid* and *of policies*.
29. **for** **Correct Answer: for**
 ✓ **Explanation:** The fixed formal phrase **a compelling case can be made for** requires the preposition *for* before a gerund or noun phrase. *A compelling case can be made for greater investment in public services.* This is a standard C1 academic argumentative device.
30. **may** **Correct Answer: may**
 ✓ **Explanation:** **Be that as it may** is a fixed C1 concessive discourse marker meaning 'even so' or 'regardless of that'. It is used to acknowledge a point before introducing a contrasting argument. *Be that as it may, the policy was implemented regardless.*

Part 4: Matrix / Match Values

31. Exacerbate: C • Perpetuate: B • Alleviate: D • Proliferate: A

Correct Matches:

- **Exacerbate** → To make an existing problem significantly worse
- **Perpetuate** → To cause something to continue indefinitely, especially something undesirable
- **Alleviate** → To reduce the severity or burden of a difficulty
- **Proliferate** → To increase rapidly in number or extent

✅ **Explanation:** These verbs are essential for C1 academic writing on education. **Exacerbate** is used when tuition fees *exacerbate socioeconomic inequality*, while **perpetuate** describes how debt *perpetuates cycles of poverty*. **Alleviate** collocates with 'burden' (*alleviate the financial burden*), and **proliferate** suits contexts such as *private institutions proliferating* across the sector.

32. Notwithstanding: A • Inasmuch as: C • Be that as it may: B

Correct Matches:

- **Notwithstanding** → To acknowledge a point while contrasting it with an opposing argument
- **Inasmuch as** → To introduce a reason or justification for a preceding claim
- **Be that as it may** → To accept a point but signal that it does not change the overall conclusion

✅ **Explanation:** **Notwithstanding** functions similarly to 'despite' but with greater formal weight, e.g. *Notwithstanding the fiscal constraints, universal access remains a priority*. **Inasmuch as** introduces causality, e.g. *inasmuch as education is a public good*. **Be that as it may** concedes a counterargument elegantly before reasserting the main position.

33. Seldom has the case for equitable access to knowledge been so compellingly argued.: C • What remains incontrovertible is that financial barriers disproportionately disadvantage lower-income students.: B • Having examined both the fiscal constraints and the societal benefits, one must conclude that reform is overdue.: A

Correct

Matches:

- **Seldom has the case for equitable access...** → Inversion for emphasis
- **What remains incontrovertible is that...** → Cleft sentence for focus
- **Having examined both the fiscal constraints...** → Non-finite participle clause

✓ **Explanation:** **Inversion** places an adverb before the auxiliary to create rhetorical force. **Cleft sentences** beginning with '*What...*' isolate the key argument for maximum impact. **Non-finite participle clauses** beginning with '*Having + past participle*' demonstrate syntactic sophistication central to C1 academic writing.

34. Formal Proposal: C • Analytical Report: B • Letter to the Editor: A • Critical Review: D

Correct Matches:

• **Formal Proposal** →

Distinct sub-headings
with persuasive yet
objective modal
language

• **Analytical Report** →

Impersonal academic
stance with heavy
nominalisation and
evidence synthesis

• **Letter to the Editor**

→ Diplomatic advocacy
and polite refutation of
a published argument

• **Critical Review** →

Nuanced evaluative
lexis assessing
thematic and socio-
cultural significance

✓ **Explanation:** Each
C1 genre has distinct
conventions.

Proposals use modals
like '*It would be*

advisable to...', while

reports favour passive
structures and

nominalisation. **Letters**
to the Editor combine

firm opinion with

courtesy, and **critical**

reviews deploy words

such as *evocative,*

polarising, or poignant.

35. While free tuition would undoubtedly widen participation,: C • It was the escalating burden of student debt: A • Not until alternative revenue streams are identified: B

Correct

Matches:

• **While free tuition would undoubtedly widen participation,**

→ the sustainability of such a model remains a subject of considerable debate.

• **It was the escalating burden of student debt**

→ that prompted policymakers to reconsider the existing funding framework.

• **Not until alternative revenue streams are identified →**

can governments realistically commit to abolishing tuition fees.



Explanation:

The first pair uses

concessive 'While' to balance two ideas. The second is a **cleft sentence**

using '*It was... that...*' for focus. The

third
demonstrates
inversion
after a
negative
adverbial
(‘Not until’), a
hallmark of
advanced
academic
writing.

36. Cast doubt upon: C • Spark controversy: B • Exert influence: D • Wreak havoc: A

Correct Matches:

- **Cast doubt upon** → To undermine the credibility of an opposing argument or data set
- **Spark controversy** → To initiate intense public or academic disagreement
- **Exert influence** → To apply sustained pressure or effect on a decision or outcome
- **Wreak havoc** → To cause severe and widespread disruption to a system or institution

✅ **Explanation:**

Collocational precision is critical at C1. *Cast doubt upon* the reliability of statistics; proposals to abolish fees *spark controversy* among economists; lobby groups *exert influence* on legislation; unchecked debt can *wreak havoc* on graduate financial stability.

37. The rapid implementation of free tuition policies: C • A significant reduction in socioeconomic inequality: A • The consistent underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups: B

Correct Matches:

- **The rapid implementation of free tuition policies** → When they quickly made tuition free
- **A significant reduction in socioeconomic inequality** → Making things much fairer for poorer people
- **The consistent underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups** → The fact that disadvantaged people are often left out

✓ **Explanation:**

Nominalisation transforms verbs and adjectives into noun phrases, creating the impersonal, formal register expected at C1. Phrases like *'the rapid implementation of'* replace wordy, colloquial structures, lending writing greater precision and academic gravitas.

38. Introducing a counterargument: B • Refuting a counterargument: A • Stating the essay's conclusion: C

Correct Matches:

• **Introducing a counterargument**

→ Critics contend, not without justification, that the financial burden of universal provision would prove unsustainable.

• **Refuting a counterargument**

→ While this objection carries a degree of merit, closer scrutiny reveals that Nordic nations have successfully maintained such systems.

• **Stating the essay's conclusion**

→ Upon rigorous evaluation, a compelling case can be made for the phased introduction of tuition-free higher education.

✓ **Explanation:** **Counterarguments** are introduced with reporting verbs like '*contend*'.

Refutations use concessive clauses before pivoting with '*closer scrutiny reveals*'.

Conclusions at C1 employ evaluative phrases like '*Upon rigorous evaluation*' to signal synthesis and closure.

39. Purpose and Background: B • Assessment of Current Impediments: C • Actionable Recommendations: A • Projected Long-Term Benefits: D

Correct Matches:

• **Purpose and Background** → An overview of the current situation and the rationale for proposing changes

• **Assessment of Current Impediments** → An analysis of existing obstacles such as tuition fee structures and access inequality

• **Actionable Recommendations** → Specific, practical steps for government bodies to implement a free higher education model

• **Projected Long-Term Benefits** → A forward-looking evaluation of anticipated social and economic outcomes

✓ **Explanation:** A **formal proposal** follows a logical structure. '*Purpose and Background*' contextualises the issue; '*Impediments*' diagnoses problems; '*Recommendations*' prescribe solutions using modals like '*It would be advisable to...*'; and '*Benefits*' justifies the proposal with projected outcomes.

40. It is widely contended that higher education should be treated as a public good.: B • The findings are purported to demonstrate a correlation between graduate debt and reduced social mobility.: A • It has been proposed that a graduate tax could serve as a viable alternative to tuition fees.: C

Correct Matches:

- **It is widely contended that...** → To present a broadly held position without attributing it to a specific source
- **The findings are purported to demonstrate...** → To report research claims while maintaining a degree of critical distance
- **It has been proposed that...** → To introduce a policy suggestion in an impersonal, objective manner



Explanation:
Passive reporting verbs are a hallmark of C1 academic writing. *'It is widely contended'* generalises consensus; *'purported to demonstrate'* signals cautious, critical engagement with evidence; and *'It has*

been proposed'
introduces
ideas without
the writer
assuming full
ownership,
maintaining the
necessary
scholarly
impartiality.

Part 5: Sort the Values

41. Correct Answer: Seldom has the question of university funding sparked such widespread controversy.

✓ **Explanation:** This sentence uses **fronted negative adverb inversion**. When a negative or restrictive adverb such as *Seldom* opens a sentence, the auxiliary verb **has** must precede the subject **the question**, followed by the past participle **sparked** and the object noun phrase. This inverted structure is a hallmark of formal, emphatic C1 writing.

42. Correct Answer: What remains incontrovertible is that higher education confers immeasurable benefits upon society.

✓ **Explanation:** This is a **cleft sentence** used for rhetorical emphasis. The structure *What + clause + is + that-clause* places focus on the predicate complement. The subject **What remains incontrovertible** is followed by the linking verb **is** and the nominal *that-clause*. The collocation *confers benefits upon* is a precise C1 academic expression.

43. Correct Answer: Notwithstanding the financial burden on the state, proponents argue that free tuition would significantly reduce socioeconomic inequality.

✓ **Explanation:** The sentence opens with the advanced **concessive preposition** *Notwithstanding*, followed by a noun phrase. A comma separates this fronted prepositional phrase from the main clause. The main clause follows the standard **Subject + Verb + Object** pattern: **proponents** (subject), **argue** (verb), **that-clause** (object).

44. Correct Answer: It is widely contended that the commodification of education undermines its fundamental purpose.

✓ **Explanation:** This sentence uses a **passive reporting structure** with the impersonal pronoun **It** as a dummy subject, followed by **is widely contended** (passive voice with mid-position adverb *widely*), and a *that-clause* as the logical subject. **Nominalisation** is evident in *the commodification of education*, a key feature of formal academic register.

45. Correct Answer: Having weighed the contradictory evidence, one must conclude that a purely market-driven approach is untenable.

✓ **Explanation:** This sentence opens with a **non-finite perfect participle clause** (*Having weighed*), which implies that the action of weighing evidence preceded the conclusion. A comma separates it from the main clause. The impersonal pronoun **one** is used as the subject, reflecting formal academic tone, followed by the modal **must** and the main verb **conclude**.

46. Correct Answer: It was the lack of equitable access that prompted calls for a comprehensive reform of tuition policy.

✓ **Explanation:** This is an **it-cleft sentence**, structured as *It + was + focused element + that + remainder of clause*. The cleft construction places strong emphasis on **the lack of equitable access** as the causal factor. This structure is frequently used in formal essays to foreground a specific argument with precision and rhetorical force.

47. Correct Answer: In light of the prevailing evidence, a compelling case can be made for the gradual abolition of tuition fees.

✓ **Explanation:** The sentence opens with the **discourse marker** *In light of the prevailing evidence*, a formal prepositional phrase signalling that a conclusion is being drawn. A comma follows before the main clause. The main clause uses **passive voice** (*can be made*) with **nominalisation** (*abolition of tuition fees*), both characteristic of C1 academic writing.

48. Correct Answer: Critics, however, contend that the implementation of free higher education would inevitably place an unsustainable strain on public finances.

✓ **Explanation:** The **conjunctive adverb** *however* is inserted **parenthetically** between two commas after the subject **Critics**, signalling contrast with a preceding argument. The main verb **contend** introduces a *that*-clause. The mid-position adverb **inevitably** is correctly placed between the modal *would* and the main verb *place*. The collocation *place a strain on* is precise C1 usage.

49. Correct Answer: Not until all avenues of private funding had been exhausted did the committee seriously consider a state-subsidised model.

✓ **Explanation:** This sentence uses **negative fronting inversion** with the conjunction *Not until*. When a clause beginning with *Not until* is fronted, the main clause must undergo **subject-auxiliary inversion**: the auxiliary **did** precedes the subject **the committee**. The subordinate clause uses the **past perfect passive** (*had been exhausted*) to show that exhausting funding options preceded the committee's decision.

50. Correct Answer: All things considered, the debate surrounding free higher education demands a nuanced evaluation of both fiscal responsibility and social justice.

✓ **Explanation:** The sentence opens with the **absolute phrase / discourse marker** *All things considered*, used to introduce a concluding or synthesising statement, followed by a comma. The main clause follows standard **Subject + Verb + Object** order: **the debate** (subject), **demands** (verb), **a nuanced evaluation** (object). The *both...and* correlative conjunction correctly coordinates **fiscal responsibility** and **social justice**.

Score Guide

45–50 Correct	Excellent! You have mastered this topic.
38–44 Correct	Very good! Review the rules you missed.
30–37 Correct	Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples.
0–29 Correct	Study the lesson again before retaking the test.