



Shopping and Consumer Life

Note-taking: online customer reviews | Cambridge IGCSE ESL 0510/0511

1. Lead-in discussion

Talk with a partner before you read.

1. Do you read online reviews before buying something?
2. What makes a review seem trustworthy or untrustworthy?
3. Can adverts look like real customer opinions?
4. How should shoppers check information before spending money?

Exercise 3 at a glance

In this activity, you will read one factual text and complete notes using information from the text. In the exam, this task is usually worth 7 marks. This practice version includes extra notes to help you build confidence. Use short words or phrases from the text, not your own ideas.

2. Read for overall understanding

Read the text. Why should shoppers read online reviews carefully?

Reading Online Reviews Carefully

Online customer reviews can help shoppers compare products before they spend money. A detailed review may describe delivery, customer service, packaging and how well an item works after several weeks. However, shoppers need to read carefully because some reviews are incomplete, exaggerated or not genuine. A five-star rating is not always enough information, especially if the customer only says that the product is 'great' without explaining why. Some websites also mark reviews as 'verified purchase', which means the reviewer bought the item through that site. This can be useful, but it still does not prove that every comment is fair or complete.

Useful reviews often mention specific evidence. A shopper might explain that a bag looked smart but the zip broke after two weeks, or that a pair of headphones had clear sound but uncomfortable ear pads. These details help other buyers judge whether a product suits their needs. Reviews written after longer use can be more helpful than comments posted on the day the product arrived. A review that mentions both strengths and weaknesses often feels more reliable than one that sounds completely positive. For example, a customer might recommend a backpack but still explain that the side pocket is too small for a large bottle.

There are warning signs. Some reviews repeat the same phrases, use unnatural praise or appear within minutes of each other. Others complain about delivery when the problem was caused by the courier, not the product. Shoppers also need to notice whether a reviewer received a free item, because this may affect their judgement. Many websites now label sponsored reviews, but the label can be easy to miss. Another problem is that star ratings can hide important differences. A product with hundreds of short positive reviews may be less helpful than a product with fewer reviews that explain size, comfort, durability and customer service clearly.

Careful shoppers compare several sources. They may read negative reviews first, check photographs from real customers and look for comments about refunds or repairs. It is also useful to compare the review date with the current product version, because companies sometimes improve an item after earlier complaints. Online reviews cannot remove every risk, but they can help shoppers avoid impulse buying and think more critically about advertising, brands and value for money. Teachers sometimes use review pages to help students practise critical reading. Students compare two products, identify emotional language and decide which details are evidence rather than advertising. This makes the activity useful for consumer life as well as exam preparation.

3. Strategy focus

Separate useful evidence from opinion

A review text may include opinions, examples and warnings. Copy the phrase that fits the note heading, not the whole opinion sentence.

4. Practice note-taking task

Complete the notes using information from the text. Use short words or phrases from the text. Do not add your own ideas.

Notes	Write short answers
What detailed reviews may describe	- - -
Useful evidence in reviews	- - -
Warning signs	- - -
How careful shoppers compare sources	- - -

5. Vocabulary notebook

Underline five useful words or phrases from the text. Check their meaning, then record them in your vocabulary notebook.

6. Follow-up tasks

1. Discussion: What kind of review would make you decide not to buy something?
2. Strategy: Choose three answers and underline the exact words that make them useful short notes.
3. Writing: Write advice for a teenager who trusts online adverts too quickly.
4. Vocabulary: Circle words and phrases connected to reviews, advertising and value for money.

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2. Read for overall understanding

Suggested answer: because reviews can help shoppers compare products, but some reviews may be incomplete, exaggerated or not genuine.

4. Practice note-taking task

What detailed reviews may describe

- delivery
- customer service
- packaging

Useful evidence in reviews

- zip broke after two weeks
- clear sound
- uncomfortable ear pads

Warning signs

- repeat the same phrases
- use unnatural praise / unnatural praise
- appear within minutes of each other / within minutes of each other

How careful shoppers compare sources

- read negative reviews first
- check photographs from real customers
- look for comments about refunds or repairs

Notes for checking

This is an extended practice version of the IGCSE ESL note-taking task. The live exam normally has fewer marks, but this version includes extra notes to build confidence and selection skills.

Accept short phrases that keep the same meaning.

Learners should avoid copying a whole sentence if a shorter note answers the heading.

Some answers need more than one or two words, especially when the key detail is a phrase.