Essay

Synthesize two views of museum access

Full exam-style C2 Proficiency Part 1 essay task. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Read the two texts below. Write an essay summarising and evaluating their key points. Use your own words throughout as far as possible, and include your own ideas. Write 240-280 words.

Source A: Access beyond the building

A collection placed online is no longer confined to the people who can afford a journey or enter an unfamiliar institution. Someone caring for a relative can explore it at midnight; a distant student can compare objects held in several countries. This expansion of opportunity deserves investment. Yet counting uploaded images tells us little about the quality of access. Without clear explanations, accessible navigation and opportunities to ask questions, a digital collection can be as intimidating as a locked display case. The challenge is therefore to make knowledge usable, not merely to make objects visible on a screen.

Source B: The value of being there

A physical encounter with an object offers qualities a photograph cannot fully reproduce: scale, texture and the relation between neighbouring exhibits. Leaving everyday surroundings may also encourage the sustained attention that online distractions interrupt. These are reasons to preserve museum spaces, not proof that everyone can benefit from them. Admission charges, inaccessible buildings and inconvenient opening hours can turn a public collection into a privilege enjoyed by a narrow group. Museums should defend the value of being there by making that experience practically possible for more people, rather than assuming that the existence of a building guarantees meaningful public access.

Write 240-280 words.

Write your response on separate paper before studying the model below.

One possible response

Museums increasingly face a false choice between expanding online collections and protecting physical visits. Both texts suggest that access should be judged by what people can actually experience and understand, rather than by the mere availability of objects. Their different emphases point towards complementary responsibilities.

The first text rightly welcomes digital provision for overcoming distance and allowing people to explore collections around other commitments. Its more significant argument, however, is that availability alone is inadequate. An unexplained image may widen potential reach without increasing understanding. In my view, investment in captions, navigable connections and responsive educational support is therefore as important as increasing the number of objects uploaded. Otherwise, participation becomes an impressive statistic rather than a meaningful achievement.

The second text identifies what this provision cannot entirely replace: the physical qualities of objects and an environment that encourages concentrated attention. Nevertheless, its criticism of practical barriers challenges any complacent defence of museum buildings. A compelling exhibition offers little public benefit to someone excluded by its price or opening hours. Equally, the possibility of distraction online does not mean that every digital encounter is superficial; the setting influences attention without wholly determining it.

The strongest policy would consequently develop both forms of access while assessing them through users' needs. Flexible visiting arrangements and inclusive buildings should accompany digital material designed for understanding, not simply display. Limited budgets require choices, but those choices should address identifiable barriers rather than defend one medium in principle. The two texts ultimately support the same standard: a public collection succeeds when more people can engage with it in ways that have substance.

This is an original model, not an official marked script. Other approaches can also meet the task.

Understand the task and model

Task and assessment focus

This is a complete discursive essay for an educated reader, not a personal museum review. Cover both texts, summarise their central points accurately, evaluate them and add a reasoned view in 240-280 words. The model is one possible response, not an official script or guaranteed score. Content concerns coverage; Communicative Achievement concerns an appropriately discursive tone; Organisation concerns the argument's progression; Language concerns precise, controlled expression.

Plan and source map

The opening finds a shared principle: meaningful access. Paragraph two combines Source A's flexible, distant access with its requirement for interpretation and usable design. Paragraph three combines Source B's physical experience and focused attention with its warning about cost, buildings and hours. The conclusion brings both together in a practical policy. This covers two key points from each source without giving each text an isolated summary and stopping there.

Evaluate rather than repeat

"An unexplained image may widen potential reach without increasing understanding" develops Source A's warning into a test of investment priorities. "The setting influences attention without wholly determining it" qualifies Source B's contrast between museum focus and online distraction. These sentences explain the writer's judgement rather than merely saying that each source is right.

Synthesis and own contribution

The conclusion proposes assessing both media through users' needs. The additional point about limited budgets is linked to the sources: prioritise identifiable barriers. An alternative essay could favour one medium for a specified audience, but would still need to evaluate both source arguments and explain its priorities.

Organisation and language choices

"Its more significant argument, however" moves from access in principle to access in practice. "Nevertheless" introduces a limitation to the case for buildings; "Equally" then qualifies an overstatement in the other direction. Phrases such as "potential reach", "identifiable barriers" and "meaningful achievement" should be chosen for precision, not for sounding advanced. The model avoids copying distinctive source sentences.

Pitfalls to avoid

Do not write two disconnected summaries, ignore practical barriers in Source B, or treat Source A as saying every online collection is effective. Do not invent survey results to justify a preferred policy. A strong essay can disagree with a source, but first represents its claim fairly and gives a reason for the disagreement.

Check your own response

- Have I summarised digital reach and the need for usable interpretation?
- Have I covered physical experience and practical barriers to visiting?
- Have I evaluated ideas from both sources, not merely reported them?
- Does my own judgement connect the two texts?
- Have I paraphrased in an appropriately discursive register?
- Is my complete essay within 240-280 words?