

CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH: PRELIMINARY SKILLS TEST INTRODUCTION

CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH TESTS

The definitions of standards

For over 100 years the Cambridge English Tests have allowed millions of students and teachers to recognise levels of excellence in learning and teaching. Schools, universities and companies around the world have used these tests as a benchmark to set a standard for students and staff, and now more than four million people in 160 countries support the Cambridge English Tests.

The Common European Framework of Reference for language skills

(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR)

The CEFR guidelines are widely used in Europe to indicate the level of language learning acquired; it is also increasingly being adopted in other parts of the world.

The CEFR classifies language learning into six levels, as follows:

A1	Beginner
A2	Elementary
B1	Intermediate
B2	Upper-intermediate
C1	Advanced
C2	Proficiency

The Cambridge English Tests are aligned with the CEFR as follows:

A1	Cambridge English: Young Learners – Movers	(YLE Movers)
A2	Cambridge English: Key	(KET)
B1	Cambridge English: Preliminary	(PET)
B2	Cambridge English: First	(FCE)
C1	Cambridge English: Advanced	(CAE)
C2	Cambridge English: Proficiency	(CPE)

This internationally recognised classification system gives students and teachers a clear and precise indication of the path to follow during the course of study. The examinations, which certify the achievement of all levels, are a highly motivating factor for students. Passing a language test for international students is very often a major strengthening of self-confidence and acts as a stimulus to support further efforts to achieve higher goals.

PRELIMINARY TEST (PET)

Level

As you can see from the table, the Preliminary Test correlates to the third level (B1) on the CEFR scale. A student who exceeds the Preliminary level will then have reached an intermediate level of English language proficiency.

Why support the Preliminary Test?

One major reason for students to take the Cambridge Preliminary Test is to access further education and work. English is a prerequisite to many academic institutions, and companies only accept international certifications, such as the Preliminary Test, as proof of language proficiency. Taking the test while students are still at school gives students the opportunity to invest in their future and if they wish, progress onto the higher level exams.

Taking PET is not only about obtaining a certificate but it is also useful for future studies or jobs. The preparation for the exam is a learning process during which students learn to develop the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking at intermediate level, while at the same time acquiring a firm grasp of the basics of the English language. This results in the ability for students to do the following:

Reading

- Understand specific information in a variety of texts
- Understand the overall meaning and purpose of a text

Writing

- Write letters, messages, emails etc.

Listening

- Identify key information and specific information in conversations, monologues or interviews
- Identify the attitudes and opinions of speakers

Speaking

- Give concrete and personal information
- Propose, negotiate and agree
- Describe things
- Express opinions

The examination in detail

Paper 1 Reading and Writing	1 hour 30 minutes	50% of the overall mark (25% Reading 25% Writing)
Paper 2 Listening	About 30 minutes	25% of the overall mark
Paper 3 Speaking	10–12 minutes	25% of the overall mark

READING

PART 1

5 questions (5 points)

This part consists of five short texts in the form of notes, emails, directions, text messages etc. There are three possible answers, one of which is correct. For example:

Look at the text in each question.
What does it say?
Mark the correct letter A, B or C.

3

Mum, Tell Dad I'm studying for my exams with Louise over at her house. See you soon! Bob	A Louise is at Bob's house. B Bob is not at home. C Louise is doing an exam.
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The correct answer is B.

PART 2

5 questions (5 points)

There are five short descriptions of people and eight longer texts relating to books, holidays, websites, courses etc. Students must identify which book, party, website, course etc. is most suitable for each person. For example:

These teenagers are planning to spend some time at a summer camp.
Read the descriptions of eight summer camps.
Decide which summer camp would be best for each teenager.

9 Paolo reads fantasy novels about old, historic castles and house and he wants to stay in one. He doesn't want to share a room.

H **Pembroke Heights** is a very large 17th century country house set in majestic parkland. Horse riding and cycling in the countryside are the main activities. There are single rooms but most people prefer to share. The food is excellent.

Pembroke Heights is suitable for Paul because it is the only summer camp of the eight described where there are single rooms.

PART 3

10 questions (10 points)

This part consists of a descriptive text (a brochure, advertisement, events etc.); students must read it and determine whether the ten statements related to it are true or false. For example:

Look at the sentences below about the city of Dublin.

Mark A for correct and B for incorrect.

16 You can only shop on the south side of the city. A B

Shopping

The River Liffey divides the centre of Dublin into two parts (the north side and the south side) but you can shop to your heart's content on both sides. On the north side, Henry Street is car-free so it's ideal for walking and browsing around for souvenirs. On the south side, you can shop in Grafton Street and stop along the way to listen to the musicians and singers who perform on the street.

The correct answer is B.

PART 4

5 questions (5 points)

This part consists of a long text that not only includes factual information, but also describes attitudes and opinions. Students must read and understand the meaning of the text and answer five multiple choice questions, demonstrating that they have understood the purpose and the opinion of the writer. There are four options for each question, one of which is correct. For example:

Read the text and questions below.
For each question, mark the correct letter A, B, C or D.

NEVER SAY NEVER

Georgina Waters is a tall, graceful lady. She lives in a little cottage in a small village in the south-east of England. She lives a quiet life but she is remarkable because at the age of eighty-two she is learning Chinese.

'My granddaughter's new husband is from Beijing,' says Georgina, 'And he speaks English very well but I want to communicate with his family.' She has private lessons at home twice a week and now, after a year, she knows how to write and read a lot of Chinese characters.

21 In the text the writer is

- A encouraging old people to learn a new language.
- B giving information about learning a new language.
- C telling the reader about how and why one woman is learning a new language.
- D explaining how difficult it is to learn a new language.

The correct answer is C.

PART 5

10 questions (10 points)

Students must read a short descriptive or narrative text containing 10 numbered blanks. For every blank space, students must choose the correct option out of four choices. In this part of the test, grammar and vocabulary are being tested. For example:

Read the text below and choose the correct word for each space.

For each question, mark the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

MY CLASSROOM

The teachers sit at a big desk in front (27) _____ the smart board.

27 A of B over C to D at

The correct answer is A.

WRITING

PART 1

Question 5 (5 points)

This part is consists of five complete sentences on a common theme. Under each of them there is a second sentence with a blank space. Students must complete the second sentence with no more than three words so that it has the same meaning of the first sentence. This part focuses on grammatical accuracy. No points will be awarded if there are spelling errors. For example:

Here are some sentences about shops and shopping.

For each question, complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first. Use no more than three words.

3 There are films for kids on Thursdays and Fridays.
There are films for kids _____ week.

The answer is: There are films for kids twice a week.

Part 2

Question 6 (5 points)

Students are asked to write a short message of 35–45 words. It lists three pieces of information that must be included in the message and students have to cover all three points. For example:

You are on holiday. Write an email to a friend and say

- where you are
- what you do every day
- what you like about the holiday

Write 35–45 words.

PART 3

Questions 7 & 8 (15 points)

In this part students are asked to produce a text longer than that in Question 6. The students choose between an informal letter or a story and write about 100 words. Students are evaluated on content, communication skills, organisation of text and accuracy of language.

Question 7

Students read an extract of a letter from a friend that gives details on what they must write. For example:

This is part of a letter you receive from your English friend, Wayne.

I have lots of hobbies but I love playing the guitar. I also go swimming every day. What hobbies do you have and what sports do you play? Tell me about them!

Now write a letter to Wayne, answering his questions.

Question 8

Students are given a short title or the first sentence of a story. For example,

Your English teacher has asked you to write a story.

This is the title for your story:
A day out I really enjoyed

LISTENING




7 questions (7 points)

PART 1

Students listen to each part twice. For each question there is a brief listening text and three visual images. Students must answer the question by choosing the image that best represents the correct answer. For example:

02 There are seven questions in this part. For each question there are three pictures and a short recording. Choose the correct picture and put a tick in the box below it. Before we start, here is an example.

2 When is Mike's birthday?

A  B  C 

AUDIOSCRIPT

2 When is Mike's birthday?

Girl: Are you going to Mike's birthday party next week?

Boy: You bet. Friday the 13th! What bad luck!

Girl: No need to worry. You're wrong. It's on Saturday.

Boy: Just as well!

The correct answer is C.

PART 2

6 questions (6 points)

Students listen to a long monologue or an interview and answer the questions by choosing the correct option from three that are provided. For example:

This is a radio interview with Sabrina Taylor, the 17-year-old winner of Best Voice of Britain. For each question, put a tick in the correct box.

8 After her win Sabrina feels

A excited. B tired. C surprised.

AUDIOSCRIPT

Interviewer: My next guest is singing sensation Sabrina Taylor, winner of last month's Best Voice of Britain competition. Thanks for coming, Sabrina. First of all, how do you feel after your great win?

Sabrina: Pretty cool. It's still a surprise. I wake up every morning and say, 'Is this really true? Is this really happening to me?'

The correct answer is C.

PART 3

6 questions (6 points)

Students listen to a longer monologue and read a text with blanks which summarises the information in the listening text. Students must complete the text with additional information. For example:

You will hear a teacher talking to a group of students who are starting a one-week English language course at Mayfield College.

For each question fill in the missing information in the numbered space.

Trip to Lake Solitude: Bus leaves at 14.30 on Thursday from outside the (17) _____.

AUDIOSCRIPT

On Thursday afternoon there's a trip to Lake Solitude. The bus leaves from outside the main entrance at half past two.

The answer is: main entrance.

PART 4

Question 6 (6 points)

Students listen to a long informal dialogue and must decide whether the six sentences related to it are true or false based on what they have heard. For example:

Look at the six sentences for this part.

You will hear a boy, Rick, and a girl, Debbie, talking about music.

Decide if each sentence is correct or incorrect. If it is correct put a tick in the box under A for YES. If it is not correct, put a tick under B for NO.

A	B
YES	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20 Debbie wants Rick to turn up the volume.

AUDIOSCRIPT

Debbie: Can you turn the volume down, please Rick? Who are they anyway?

Rick: A brilliant new band called 'Girls Away'. What do you think?

The correct answer is B.

SPEAKING

25 points

Students are examined in pairs or, sometimes, in groups of three.

PART 1

(2-3 minutes)

Students get asked questions about their personal life, daily habits, preferences etc. For example:

- Do you study any other languages apart from English?
- What's your favourite part of the day, morning, afternoon or evening?
- What's your favourite colour?

PART 2

(2-3 minutes)

In this part, the examiner describes a situation to the students, who are invited to talk about it together. Students are handed a sheet with some visual cues that provide ideas for conversation. For example:

In the next part you are going to talk to each other.

I'm going to describe a situation to you.

Your friend, Lucy, is 16 next week and you want to buy her a present. Talk together about the different presents you can give her and decide which is best.

On page 2 there is a picture with some ideas to help you.

PART 3

(3 minutes)

Each candidate is given a different picture on a common theme. They describe what is shown in their photos in a minute. For example:

Now I'd like each of you to talk on your own about something.

I'm going to give each of you a photograph of people spending time outside.
(See photographs on page 3.)

Candidate A, please tell us what you can see in your photograph.

Candidate B, please tell us what you can see in your photograph.

PART 4

(3 minutes)

Students speak together using the theme that was introduced in Part 3. For example:

Your photographs show people spending time outside. Now, I'd like you to talk together about what you like doing when you are outside and who you spend time outside with.

THINK TEST

The *Think* practice test corresponds to what has been studied in the Students' Book. The Preliminary Skills Test has two objectives:

- to give students the opportunity to practice for the Preliminary Test,
- to enable students to practise the functions, grammatical structures and vocabulary they have learned in the Students' Book.

Time allowed for the Tests

Given the limitations of time available in the classroom, the tests can be given separately.

Guidelines for Listening

Listening is often the most difficult skill to master for students. Therefore, making sure students get plenty of listening practice beforehand is key. Here are some tips:

- Encourage students to read the question and all the options carefully before they listen. Check that they have read and understood the question(s).
- Get students used to listening to an audio recording twice before answering the questions. Encourage them to listen for general context and understanding the first time and to focus on the part where they think the answer is on a second listening.

Guidelines for speaking

Part 2 and Part 4

Any activity where students are required to interact together in pairs or in groups provides good preparation. With regard to Part 2, students should be encouraged to use the full range of visual messages available rather than focusing on the result. Students are evaluated based on the appropriateness of the language used and the effectiveness of interactive strategies used rather than on achieving a result.

Part 3

Students must always be aware that the time available to them to describe the picture is one minute. The descriptions must be simple (clothes, time of day, weather, objects, actions etc.) And students do not have to think about the content of the photograph.

Assessment

Here is an excerpt of the rating scales used by examiners for the Cambridge English Language Assessment. The following descriptors correspond to a minimum score that is 6 on a scale of 0–10.

Grammar and Vocabulary: Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about familiar topics.

Management of the speech: Provides answers that extend beyond short sentences, despite hesitations. Descriptions are mostly relevant, but there may be some repetition. Uses elements of cohesion.

Pronunciation: It is mostly intelligible and has some control of the phonological features in expressions and in the intonation of words.

Interactive communication: Starts a conversation and responds appropriately. Maintains interaction with little encouragement and support.

Scores greater or less than 6 can be given when the performance of a student goes beyond the above or does not meet the above criteria.

Further reading

Elliott, S and Gallivan, L (2012) *Preliminary for Schools Trainer*, Cambridge University Press.

Driscoll, L (2005) *Common Mistakes at PET ... and How to Avoid Them*, Cambridge University Press.

Hashemi, L and Thomas, B (2006) *Cambridge Grammar for PET with Answers and Audio CD* Cambridge University Press.

Ireland, S and Kosta, J (2008) *Cambridge Vocabulary for PET with Answers and Audio CD*, Cambridge University Press.