

Cambridge English Proficiency

Cambridge English: Proficiency (CPE) *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*

Is there a wordlist for Cambridge English: Proficiency exams?

No. Examinations that are at CEFR Level B2 (independent user), or above – such as *Cambridge English: Proficiency* – do not have particular language specifications or vocabulary lists.

Do I have to pass each paper in order to pass the whole examination?

No. Your overall performance is calculated by averaging the scores you achieve in Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Use of English. The weighting of each of the four skills and Use of English is equal.

Reading and Use of English

DO

- ✓ Read the instructions, texts and questions very carefully.
- ✓ Work through the parts of the paper in the order that suits you best.
- ✓ Read the sources, titles and subtitles of the texts where given; they are there to help you.
- ✓ Read each text carefully before you answer the questions to get an overall impression and understanding of it.
- ✓ Check the words around the gap carefully in Part 1. Remember, the missing word(s) may form part of an idiom, fixed phrase or collocation.
- ✓ Read the complete sentence which contains the gap in Part 2. Remember that the missing word(s) are more likely to have a grammatical focus than a lexical one.
- ✓ Check that the completed sentence makes sense in the passage as a whole. Remember, the missing word(s) must fit the context of the passage (Parts 1 and 2).
- ✓ Think about all the changes a word may require in Part 3: suffix, prefix, internal, more than one, singular, plural or negative, change of word class.
- ✓ Read the questions carefully and check each option against the text before rejecting it (Parts 1, 5, 6 and 7).
- ✓ Keep an overall idea of the development of the text in Part 6. You will need to check that the extracts chosen to fit the gaps in the base text fit the progression of the argument or narrative as a whole.
- ✓ Decide on one answer and avoid writing alternative answers to a question.
- ✓ Check your spelling in Parts 2, 3 and 4 as correct spelling is essential.
- ✓ Transfer your answers accurately from the question paper to the answer sheet before the end of the test. You will not have additional time after the test to do this.

DON'T

- × Don't try to answer any questions without referring carefully to the text.
- × Don't spend too much time on any one part of the paper.
- × Don't forget to record your answers on the separate answer sheet.
- × Don't leave any question unanswered – you don't lose marks for incorrect answers.
- × Don't assume that if the same word appears in the text as well as in an option, this means you have located the answer (Parts 1, 5 and 7).
- × Don't alter the word given (Part 4).
- × Don't write more than eight words, including the given word (Part 4).
- × Don't write out the full sentence (Part 4).
- × Don't leave out any information from the prompt sentence (Part 4).

Will I get one or two scores for the Reading and Use of English paper?

Your Statement of Results will show two scores for this paper – one for Reading and one for Use of English. They are equally important when calculating your overall score.

How are the separate scores for Reading and Use of English determined?

On your Statement of Results and your certificate, you will receive a Cambridge English Scale score for Reading and a separate Cambridge English Scale score for Use of English (as well as Writing, Listening and Speaking). On the Reading and Use of English paper, the Reading score is derived from Parts 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8, and the Use of English score is derived from Parts 2, 3 and 4.

What kind of tasks are there in the Reading and Use of English paper?

The paper includes the following task types: multiple-choice cloze, open cloze, word formation, key word transformation, multiple choice, gapped paragraph and matching.

What kind of texts appear in the Reading and Use of English paper?

The texts come from a range of different sources and are written for different purposes. They are mainly contemporary and include non-specialist material from fiction and non-fiction books and journalism (a wide range of newspapers, magazines and journals).

What aspects of reading are being tested in the Reading and Use of English paper?

The paper tests comprehension at word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and whole-text level. Each part tests different aspects of reading, including the use of vocabulary in context, such as idioms and collocations, understanding detail, opinion and attitude, text organisation and structure, global meaning and main idea, and cohesion and coherence.

How can I best prepare myself for the Reading and Use of English paper?

It is essential for you to engage with a substantial and varied range of written English and to read extensively (preferably for pleasure, not simply for the purposes of studying) as well as intensively. This enables you to become familiar with a wide range of language and text types, and is also helpful when you are working on the longer texts in Parts 5 and 6. You should also be familiar with the technique of indicating your answers on the separate answer sheet so that you can do this quickly and accurately.

How do I fill in the answer sheet correctly?

You should use a pencil and not a pen. For Part 1 mark ONE letter for each question. In Parts 2, 3 and 4 write your answer clearly in capital letters and in Parts 2 and 3 write one letter in each box. If you make a mistake you can use an eraser and rub it out.

How long is each part of the Reading and Use of English paper?

There is no fixed answer to this question. The overall time allowed for the Reading and Use of English paper is 90 minutes. Candidates in a class preparing for the exam will almost certainly find that, as each part is a different task and tests different skills, they do not all spend the same amount of time on each part. This is normal and you should practise extensively before the exam to see how you need to manage your time. The paper has a standard structure and format, so you will know what to expect in each part of the paper. You should be aware that answers must be written on the answer sheet within the time allowed for the paper. Some students prefer to transfer their answers at the end of each task rather than wait until they have completed the whole paper.

Are marks deducted for incorrect answers?

No, they are not. All marking is positive in the sense that you will get marks for your correct answers and nothing if the answer is incorrect.

If I write two possible answers to a question, how are they marked?

You must write one answer for each question. If you write more than one answer, you will not be given any marks.

How important is spelling in the Reading and Use of English paper?

In Parts 2, 3 and 4, all spelling must be correct.

Do contractions count as one word or two?

Contracted words count as the number of words they would be if they were not contracted. For example, *isn't*, *didn't*, *I'm*, *I'll* are counted as two words (replacing *is not*, *did not*, *I am*, *I will*). Where the contraction replaces one word (e.g. *can't* for *cannot*), it is counted as one word.

What happens if I miss a negative in the transformations, thereby giving the opposite meaning to the original?

The instructions state that the second sentence must have a similar meaning to the first. However, in the mark scheme the answer is divided into two parts (see below). The two parts of the sentence (either side of the dividing line) are always treated separately, so you will receive 1 mark for correctly completing one part of the sentence, even if a negative has been omitted from the other part.

Example: *I've never thought of asking the hotel staff for advice about restaurants.*

OCCURRED

It has the hotel staff for advice about restaurants.

Answer: *never occurred to me (1) | to ask (1)*

Writing

DO

- ✓ Read each question very carefully.
- ✓ Remember that Question 1 is compulsory.
- ✓ Choose which Part 2 question to answer on the basis of what interests you the most, but also bear in mind the task type.
- ✓ Decide exactly what information you are being asked to give.
- ✓ Identify the target reader, your role as writer and your purpose in writing.
- ✓ Check which task type you are being asked to write.
- ✓ Organise your ideas and make a plan before you write.
- ✓ Use a pen, not a pencil.
- ✓ Write your answers in the booklet provided.
- ✓ Write in an appropriate style.
- ✓ Identify the key points in each text in Part 1.
- ✓ Deal with all parts of the question in Part 2.
- ✓ Calculate how many words on average you write on a line and multiply this average by the number of lines to estimate how much you have written – don't waste time counting words individually.
- ✓ Follow your plan and keep in mind your purpose for writing.
- ✓ Use as wide a range of structure and vocabulary as you can, but think carefully about when to use idioms.
- ✓ Use paragraphs, and indent when you start a new paragraph.
- ✓ Check for spelling errors and the use of punctuation – capital letters, apostrophes, commas, etc.
- ✓ Cross out errors with a single line through the word(s).
- ✓ Check structures: subject-verb agreement, tenses, word order, singular and plural nouns.
- ✓ Make sure that your handwriting can be read by the examiner.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't attempt a set text question if you have not read the book.
- ✗ Don't attempt a question if you feel unsure about the format.
- ✗ Don't include irrelevant material.
- ✗ Don't write out a rough version and then try to write a good copy – you will not have time.

There are some similarities between the writing tasks in Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) and Cambridge English: Proficiency. What is different?

Cambridge English: Proficiency questions are designed to generate language that requires you to use more abstract functions such as hypothesising, interpreting and evaluating, and to move away from just factually based responses. This raises the expected language level not only in terms of structure but also range of vocabulary and appropriateness of style and register.

Are there any differences in the way the Part 1 and Part 2 questions are assessed?

Part 1 and Part 2 questions carry equal marks, and writing examiners apply the same assessment scales to them (Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language). There is more about this in the question below.

How are extended responses in the Writing paper assessed?

Examiners mark tasks using assessment scales developed with explicit reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The scales, which are used across the Cambridge English General and Business English Writing tests, are made up of four subscales: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language:

- **Content** focuses on how well the candidate has fulfilled the task – if they have done what they were asked to do.
- **Communicative Achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the task and whether the candidate has used the appropriate register.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way the candidate puts together the piece of writing, in other words, if it is logical and ordered.
- **Language** focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

Each response is marked from 0 to 5 on each of the four subscales and these scores are combined to give a final mark for the Writing test.

If I write in a text type, such as a letter, a report, or an essay, that is different from the one asked for in the question, how will the writing be assessed?

The text type is a very important aspect of the *Cambridge English: Proficiency* Writing paper as it is a major factor in the choice of style and register for the piece of writing. For example, if you write an essay when the question has asked for an article, the register will not be totally appropriate for an article. This will have a negative effect on the target reader and will be penalised.

Will I be penalised for writing an answer that is over the word limit stated in the question?

You will not be penalised just because the text is over the word limit. However, over-length writing may lead to irrelevance, repetition and poor organisation. These factors have a negative effect on the target reader and will be penalised.

How is the writing assessed if the candidate has obviously run out of time and the answer is incomplete?

Examiners will only assess what is on the page and will not make assumptions about what you might have written. For example, if the conclusion is missing, this will affect the organisation and coherence and will be penalised.

How severely are poor spelling and punctuation penalised?

Spelling is one factor considered under the assessment scale for Language, and punctuation is one factor considered under Organisation. You do not lose a mark every time you make a spelling or punctuation mistake, so it is still possible to get a high band score with occasional native-speaker type lapses. However, spelling and punctuation are an important aspect of accuracy, and frequent errors may have a negative effect on the target reader, which is one factor considered under Communicative Achievement.

Do I have to study all the set texts?

The set text questions are optional. If you decide to answer on a set text, it is only necessary to study one of the texts as there is always a question on each of them.

Can any edition of the set texts be used for study?

Any full-length edition can be used for study. At *Cambridge English: Proficiency* level, you should not be reading simplified editions.

Will there always be a narrative question?

There will sometimes be the opportunity to write a narrative, but it will be embedded in a letter or article, as in the sample papers. Such a question will not necessarily be on every paper.

Are addresses to be omitted ONLY when stated in the task?

As a matter of policy, where the genre is given as a letter, 'You do not need to include postal addresses' is added to the instructions. In no case will the address, if you include it, be subject to assessment, either negative or positive.

Is a report format obligatory for such questions in the Writing paper?

Reports should be clearly organised and may contain headings. The report format is not obligatory, but will make a good impression on the target reader if used appropriately. The mark awarded for the report will, however, depend on how the writing meets the requirements.

Listening

DO

- ✓ Listen to and read the instructions. Make sure that you know what kind of text you will hear, what it is about and what you have to do in each part.
- ✓ Think about the topic, the development of ideas and the context as you read the questions. This will help you when you listen.
- ✓ Answer all the questions. Even if you are not sure, you have probably understood enough to make a good attempt.
- ✓ Be careful of 'word spotting' (when answers in options appear in the recording but in a different context).
- ✓ Pay attention to the role of stress and intonation in supporting meaning.
- ✓ Write the actual word you hear (Part 2).
- ✓ Check your spelling (Part 2).
- ✓ Look carefully at what is printed before and after the gap and think about the words which could fit, both logically and grammatically (Part 2).

DON'T

- ✗ Don't spend too much time on a difficult question. Move on to the next question and come back to the difficult one again later.
- ✗ Don't complicate an answer by changing or adding extra information (Part 2).

What aspects of listening are tested in the Cambridge English: Proficiency Listening paper?

The range of texts and task types reflects the variety of listening situations which you need to be able to cope with at this level.

Variety of accents:

Recordings will contain a variety of accents corresponding to standard variants of native-speaker accent.

Text types:

Texts vary in terms of length and interaction. Text types used include: interviews, discussions, conversations, talks, speeches, lectures, documentaries, instructions.

Task types:

A variety of task types is used. These reflect the different reasons for, and focuses of, listening: understanding opinion, attitude, gist, detail, main idea, speaker's purpose; inferring meaning, agreement and opinion. Three- and four-option multiple-choice exercises, sentence completion and multiple matching are used.

Will I have enough time to complete the paper?

All Cambridge English Listening tests are trialled on students to see that they have enough time to answer and complete the answer sheet. The test is designed to be as user-friendly as possible but it is useful to remind yourself of the following points:

Before listening:

The instructions for each task are heard in the recording and are followed by a pause for you to study the task for that section. You can and should use this time to study the questions printed on the page for this task to help you predict both what you will hear and what kind of information you will be required to identify and understand in order to be able to answer.

While listening:

The questions in the Listening paper follow the order of the information in the recording, and you should not waste time on a question you are having difficulty with as you might miss the answer to the following question. Each recording is heard twice.

After listening:

Five minutes are provided at the end of the recording for you to transfer your answers onto the answer sheet.

How do I record my answers?

You must write all your answers on a separate answer sheet. You may write on the question paper as you listen, but you must transfer your answers to the answer sheet. Five minutes are allocated at the end of the test for you to do this.

Is spelling important?

Part 2 is the only part of the *Cambridge English: Proficiency* Listening paper where you have to write words for your answers (in the other parts, you indicate your choice of answer by writing a letter). Answers for Part 2 (which are generally short) must be spelled correctly and must fit into the grammatical structure of the sentence. Both British English and American English spellings are accepted. Spelling must be correct for a mark to be given.

Am I supposed to write the words I hear in the recording in answers to Part 2, or do I get more marks if I use my own words?

You should try to use the actual words you hear in the recording. You do not get more marks for using your own words.

Can I wear headphones for the Listening paper?

Ask your centre whether you can use headphones or not – it depends how they choose to run the exam.

Speaking

DO

- ✓ Make sure that you know what you have to do in each part of the test and the timing involved.
- ✓ Raise the level of the conversation and discussion above the everyday and purely descriptive.
- ✓ Listen to the instructions carefully and focus on the task set.
- ✓ Listen actively to your partner, develop their ideas and opinions and work with them.
- ✓ Show interest in and respect for your partner's ideas and views.
- ✓ Make use of the prompts in your long turn if you want to.
- ✓ Respond as fully as possible and extend your ideas and opinions, giving reasons where possible.
- ✓ Remember your partner's name and use it when referring to them.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't let your partner always 'take the lead' – you must also initiate.
- ✗ Don't waffle – be direct, get to the point and say what you mean.
- ✗ Don't speak during your partner's long turn.
- ✗ Don't waste your opportunities to show the examiners what you can do.
- ✗ Don't ask the examiners how you have done.
- ✗ Don't monopolise the discussion. You must be sensitive to turn-taking (Part 2).

Why can't I do the test alone?

Research studies have shown that in order to test a wide range of language and interactive ability with different people (here the examiner and the candidate's partner), and where the test targets a particular level of ability (e.g. *Cambridge English: Proficiency* as opposed to *IELTS*), it is better to have pairs. Thus, the standard format is two candidates and two examiners. If there is an uneven number of candidates at the end of the session, the candidates will be asked to take the test in a group of three, never alone.

Can I choose who will examine me?

No. The centre decides which candidates will be assessed by which examiners. Examiners are specially recruited and trained to assess impartially and to the same standard, so it doesn't matter which examiner you have. Also, examiners are never allowed to assess their own students or anybody they know socially. And remember: there are always two examiners, both of whom make an assessment.

Do I have to prepare a talk on a topic in advance?

No. Just follow the instructions from the examiner. During your long turn, the examiner will give you a card with a question on it for you to talk about.

Can I choose which topics to talk about?

No. You will have to discuss several topics during the Speaking test and these will be ones which you should have covered when preparing for the exam. None of the topics require specialised knowledge – they will all be accessible.

What should I do if I don't understand the examiner?

You can always ask the examiner to repeat the question or the instructions. However, you should listen carefully and try to understand the first time.

For more information about *Cambridge English: Proficiency*, visit our website:

www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/proficiency