



**CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH**  
Language Assessment  
Part of the University of Cambridge

# Cambridge English Proficiency

Information for candidates



*Proof of exceptional English ability*

Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)



## How to use this guide

You can print this document if you wish, but the best way to use *Information for candidates* is to read it on screen. Click the links in the document to access other useful online resources such as videos and practice tests, and to find the information you need.


# What does Cambridge English: Proficiency involve?

*Cambridge English: Proficiency* is the highest level exam offered by Cambridge English Language Assessment. It can be taken in both paper-based and computer-based formats. It is at Level C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and is accepted by universities and employers worldwide as an indication that you have achieved an extremely high level of skill in the English language. Cambridge English Language Assessment carries out extensive research, to make sure that you get the fairest, most accurate result, and that the exam is relevant to the range of uses for which you need English.

From 2013 (the 100th anniversary of the first Proficiency exam), the exam has been revised. See below for a summary of what's in the exam.


Paper details	What's in the paper?	Skills assessed
<b>Reading and Use of English</b> 1 hour 30 minutes 40% of total marks Parts 1-4 Use of English component Parts 5-7 Reading component	First there are three short Use of English texts, each with a different task, such as supplying a missing word or forming a new word. Part 4 is not text based and involves rewriting a sentence another way. Then there are three longer Reading texts: multiple choice, gapped paragraphs and multiple matching. Texts are not for a specialised readership. They are about interesting things in the real world. Some are simply of general interest; others will have an academic slant or work-related flavour.	Parts 1-4 test your underlying knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Part 1 is mainly lexical, Part 2 is mainly grammatical, and Part 3 is all about how affixes affect words. There are lots of other sub-skills involved such as your ability to paraphrase and work out meaning from context. The reading skills you will need include very detailed reading, following an argument, coherence and linking, looking for specific information and skim reading.
<b>Writing</b> 1 hour 30 minutes 20% of total marks	First a compulsory essay where you summarise the main ideas from two short texts. Then a choice from various tasks, such as an article, letter, report or review – including a choice on a set text.	You're tested on how well you can put together and develop ideas on a topic, the impression you make on the reader, your use of language, and how well you achieve the purpose for writing. <b>See page 10</b> for more detail.
<b>Listening</b> 40 minutes 20% of total marks	There are four parts, covering short extracts; a long speech or lecture where you complete sentences; a long discussion with multiple-choice questions; and two simultaneous matching tasks. You'll have to deal with the language you might meet in a work situation, at university or indeed on the street.	This tests your ability to listen for a wide variety of real-life purposes. Within that, you might be listening for the gist of a whole extract, for a particular detail or the speaker's opinion.
<b>Speaking</b> 16 minutes Paired: two candidates together 20% of total marks	After brief introductory exchanges, you work together with another candidate on a picture-related task. Then you move on to a long turn prompted by information on a card, and finally a three-way discussion on related themes in the real world.	You're tested on many things, including your pronunciation, intonation, speed of delivery as well as your ability to organise your thoughts, negotiate and sustain a discussion. <b>See page 10</b> for more detail.

- ➔ [Download a complete sample paper here.](#)
- ➔ [Try a computer-based practice test here.](#)  
(Please note that this only works with the most recent version of Firefox.)
- ➔ [Watch a video of a Speaking test here.](#)
- ➔ [Read an examiner's comments on the candidates' performances here.](#) 2

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## Before the exam – preparation

It is important to familiarise yourself with the tasks and what they demand of you, and to get accustomed to doing them. They are designed to enable you to show what you can do in English, but only if you understand them fully first! For example, in the Speaking test if you are not familiar with what is required in a short space of time, then you may not be able to demonstrate your true ability.

Although practising grammar and vocabulary, and doing practice tests, are certainly important, these are not short cuts, and they should be just part of your exam preparation. In preparing for the exam, you need to take a whole and long-term approach to your communicative language ability, analysing your own strengths and weaknesses across all language skills.

To help you feel really prepared for *Cambridge English: Proficiency*, there is a range of **free exam preparation resources**, including:

- tips and FAQs for each exam paper
- sample papers and a computer-based practice test
- links to **further books for study**.

To support learners as they prepare for their exams, Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press have developed **a range of official preparation materials** including coursebooks and practice tests.



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### How much do you know about studying for Cambridge English: Proficiency?

#### Can you answer these questions?

1. *Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?*
2. *Why should I use an advanced monolingual dictionary to prepare for Cambridge English: Proficiency?*
3. *What kinds of things should I be reading in addition to any coursebooks I might be using?*
4. *How does doing a lot of reading help me with the Use of English component?*
5. *The Reading component tests reading in different ways. How can I practise doing this?*
6. *Where can I find texts with a good line of argument to follow and understand?*
7. *How can I help myself with the Writing paper?*
8. *How will my writing be assessed?*
9. *What is the value of looking at model answers to Writing tasks in coursebooks?*
10. *How can I expand the range of language I can use when I speak?*
11. *What is the best way to develop my speaking skills?*
12. *How will my speaking be assessed?*
13. *What else can I listen to outside the classroom?*

Find the answers on the next page

## ANSWERS

### Studying for Cambridge English: Proficiency

1. *Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?*

You can download a sample paper [here](#), and the [Cambridge English Language Assessment website](#) has more information. If you are taking a computer-based exam, [you can try a computer-based practice test here](#). (Please note that this only works with the most recent version of Firefox.)

2. *Why should I use an advanced monolingual dictionary to prepare for Cambridge English: Proficiency?*

This is especially valuable in preparing for the Use of English component of the Reading paper, but it can also be of considerable benefit for all papers. Look at a word which has many entries (e.g. sense) – the dictionary will list useful multiple meanings with common short phrase examples in current use (*a sense of relief, direction, proportion, justice, smell/taste/touch etc. there is no sense in, talk some sense into somebody, in some senses etc.*). There will be a large number of these and they will greatly expand your repertoire of collocations and fixed phrases. You can also help yourself with word formation by looking at later entries for the word (*sensible, (in)sensitive, senseless, sensor, sensitise, sensory, sensuous, sensual*). You will also find dependent prepositions and phrasal verbs.

3. *What kinds of things should I be reading in addition to any coursebooks I might be using?*

The Reading and Use of English paper will contain a wide range of texts. Try to read as many types of text as possible, such as:

- fiction books such as modern novels and short stories
- non-fiction books, especially biographies
- newspapers and magazines, including articles, written interviews, biographies, reports, reviews.

All of these types of text can be found online.

4. *How does doing a lot of reading help me with the Use of English component?*

If you read widely and often it enables you to acquire knowledge of aspects of English such as collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs and linkers, and get a feel for the syntax of written English. These things are important in the Use of English tasks.



5. *The Reading component tests reading in different ways. How can I practise doing this?*

Sometimes you read in detail and try to understand everything within a paragraph.

Sometimes you can just skim read an article or part of it – set yourself time limits to force yourself to speed read. When you do this you are trying to understand the main points, not the details.



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6. *Where can I find texts with a good line of argument to follow and understand?*

A good place to start is the official **Cambridge English practice test books**, where Reading texts are already condensed and well written. Ignoring the questions, follow the argument as it develops, looking particularly at the opening sentences of each paragraph. Then look away and retell that argument in your own words.

7. *How can I help myself with the Writing Paper?*

Some useful tips for preparing for the writing paper are:

- Practise writing under exam time conditions so that it becomes habitual.
- Familiarise yourself with the assessment criteria – content, communicative achievement, organisation and language. **See page 10 for more about how Writing is assessed.**
- Read widely to familiarise yourself with the conventions and styles of different task types: articles, essays, reports, reviews etc. The internet is invaluable when you are searching in this way.
- Write 10 minute plans for a variety of questions in past papers, so that planning becomes automatic and quick.

8. *How will my writing be assessed?*

**Click here** for information about how *Cambridge English: Proficiency* examiners assess writing.

9. *What is the value of looking at model answers to Writing tasks in coursebooks?*

You can see how answers should be structured, see how the writer is aware of the target reader, and get an idea of the variety of grammatical structures and range of vocabulary that is required.

10. *How can I expand the range of language I can use when I speak?*

Look back at the transcripts of texts you've heard for useful language. These can be found in 'with key' editions of coursebooks and exam practice tests. Record useful chunks of language that you think you can use again. Transcripts of spoken English are especially rich with colloquial expressions which can improve your own spoken performance.

11. *What is the best way to develop my speaking skills?*

The short answer is that you need to take every opportunity to speak English. Try to use English in a wide range of contexts – different topics, different people and different purposes for speaking.

12. *How will my speaking be assessed?*

**Click here** for information about how *Cambridge English: Proficiency* examiners assess speaking.

13. *What else can I listen to outside the classroom?*

Try to listen to as wide a variety of things as possible. Internet podcasts are very useful, as are English TV channels and radio stations. Listen to a range of programmes, including news broadcasts, interviews and documentaries.



How much do you know about practical things to do before the exam?

Can you answer these questions?

1. *How can I find practice tests?*
2. *How do I register for the exam?*
3. *Can I delay taking a particular paper if I don't feel ready for it?*
4. *What is the Notice to Candidates?*
5. *What do I need to take with me on exam day?*
6. *How do I register for results online?*

Find the answers on the next page



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## ANSWERS

### Practical things to do before the exam

1. *How can I find practice tests?*

**The official book of practice tests is available online** or from bookshops. There is also a free sample online test.

2. *How do I register for the exam?*

If you are already at a school that offers a course in your exam, they will do this for you. If you are registering independently, **click here** and find a centre that offers your exam. Then you can register directly with them.

3. *Can I delay taking a particular paper if I don't feel ready for it?*

No, all papers must be taken in a single session.

4. *What is the Notice to Candidates?*

It's a list of things you can and can't do in the exam room. Your exam center will give you a copy, but you can also see a copy online **here**.

5. *What do I need to take with me on exam day?*

Just your passport for identification. A bottle of water is a good idea. You can take pens and pencils, but your centre will also provide these.

6. *How do I register for results online?*

When you register for the exam, you will receive a Confirmation of Entry. This will show the web address for our Results Online site, as well as your ID number and secret number, which you will need to use to register to receive your results online.



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Taking a Cambridge English exam gives you a lot of confidence. It tests you on all aspects of the English language – it trains you in an all-round way.

Sruthi Vijayachandran, student, India

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## Exam day

Exam day can be a nerve-racking experience no matter how well prepared you are through coursework. Therefore it's important to know what to expect on the day. Doing practice tests and getting used to filling in the answer sheet is a vital part of this. You can practise this on the **online sample test**. You should expect a photograph to be taken of you at the centre.


You may also be given a sheet of candidate data to fill in. (Don't worry about this – it's just to enable us to keep accurate records on ages and nationalities taking each exam.) If you are entering the exam independently you can contact your local centre with any practical queries you may have: [www.cambridgeenglish.org/centres](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/centres)

Before you take your exam, be sure to visit the **What to expect on exam day** web page and read the **Summary Regulations for Candidates**.

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## EXAM DAY TIPS

- ✓ Go into the exam with a clear head and a good night's sleep – you will need to be fresh as a lot of concentration is required.
- ✓ You can do the questions and tasks on the Reading/Use of English and Writing papers in any order you wish, to suit your particular strengths.
- ✓ With Writing make sure you don't run out of time. It is tempting to want to write in too much detail early on, but if you do this you may find that you have to rush at the end and miss things out. Allow yourself time to plan, write, check and edit your work. If you do change or correct anything you write, make sure your corrections are clear.
- ✓ With Use of English texts, make sure you read the text as far as possible before starting on the gaps.
- ✓ Treat each gap as part of the whole text, and keep in mind the meaning of the text at each stage.
- ✓ With Listening, don't panic if you miss something. If you've read the questions in advance, this will help you to know where you are in the recording.
- ✓ With Speaking, be sure to acknowledge the other candidate's comments and pick up on them. Communicating is all about listening and responding appropriately.



- ➔ Watch a video of a Speaking test [here](#).
- ➔ Read an examiner's comments on the candidates' performances [here](#).




## After the exam

How much do you know about results and the next steps?

### Can you answer these questions?


1. *What can I do with my Cambridge English: Proficiency qualification?*
2. *How is Speaking assessed?*
3. *How is Writing assessed?*
4. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*
5. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*
6. *What exactly is the 'online Results Verification Service'?*
7. *What will I get if I don't quite pass the exam?*
8. *How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: Proficiency?*

Find the answers on the next page

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## ANSWERS

### Results and the next steps

#### 1. What can I do with my Cambridge English: Proficiency qualification?

Cambridge English exams are officially accepted by thousands of universities, employers and governments globally. They can open doors to higher education, improve job prospects and, because the qualifications are so well known globally, increase mobility. **Find out more about who accepts Cambridge English exams here.**

#### 2. How is Speaking assessed?

In the Speaking exam, there are two examiners. The interlocutor, who speaks to you, awards a mark for global achievement. The assessor, who just listens, uses five assessment criteria: *Grammatical Resource, Lexical Resource, Discourse Management, Pronunciation and Interactive Communication*. For more details, **see these examiner's comments.**

#### 3. How is Writing assessed?

Writing tasks are marked using four criteria: *Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language*.

- **Content** focuses on how well you have fulfilled the task, in other words if you have done what you were asked to do.
- **Communicative Achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the task and whether you have used the appropriate register, for example formal or informal.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way you put 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.

#### 4. What information will be on my Statement of Results?

You will see your grade, the marks required to get each grade, and then your own 'candidate profile'. This shows some bands on a grid and indicates whether your performance in each paper was 'Exceptional', 'Good', 'Borderline' or 'Weak'. You do not pass or fail individual papers – you will receive an overall grade based on all four papers.

Please see our document entitled **Understanding your Statement of Results.**

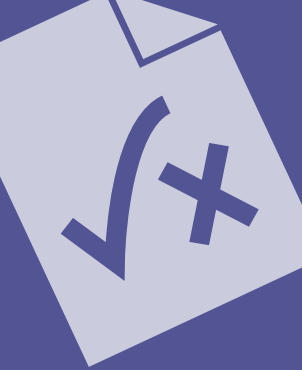


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5. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*

Statements of Results are usually released five to seven weeks after the test, and you can see your **results online**. To do this, put in your candidate ID number and secret number. These can be found on the Confirmation of Entry sheet given to you by your centre. You will then receive your certificate approximately six weeks after the results are released (or three weeks for computer-based tests).

6. *What exactly is the 'online Results Verification Service'?*

This service simply enables universities, colleges or employers to view and check exam results. You will need to provide your candidate ID number and secret number.

7. *What will I get if I don't quite pass the exam?*

If you achieve grade A, B or C in the exam, you will receive the *Certificate of Proficiency in English* at Level C2. If your performance is below Level C2, but falls within Level C1, we will recognise your achievement with a Cambridge English certificate stating that you demonstrated ability at C1 level.

8. *How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: Proficiency?*

*Cambridge English: Proficiency* is the highest level Cambridge English exam you can take, but there are other possibilities depending on your subsequent area of professional expertise. Examples are **Cambridge English: Business Higher**, **Cambridge English: Legal** and **Cambridge English: Financial**. For teachers there are a large number of possibilities, including **TKT**, **CELTA** and **Delta**.



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*Cambridge English: Proficiency* has helped me in my professional career by allowing me to work internationally, and also in my personal life by making my dreams of travelling all over the world come true.

Fili Villanueva, IT project manager  
and mountain climber, Spain

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