

Cambridge English First

Ready for success in study, work and life

Information for candidates



CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
Language Assessment
Part of the University of Cambridge

First Certificate in English (FCE)

www.cambridgeenglish.org/first

How to use this guide

You can print this document if you wish, but it is better 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.



About the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After the exam

What does Cambridge English: First involve?

Cambridge English: First is for learners who have an upper-intermediate level of English, at Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is recognised all around the world by thousands of employers, as well as colleges and universities, as proof that you can use everyday written and spoken English for work or study purposes. 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 that you may need.

About the exam

Here's a summary of what's in the exam:

Paper details	What's in the paper?	Skills assessed
Reading and Use of English 1 hour 15 minutes	There are seven parts in the Reading and Use of English paper. First, there are three short texts with different tasks. You have to complete the gaps with different kinds of words. The fourth part doesn't use a text. You have to rewrite sentences in a different way. Parts 5–7 all have texts and comprehension tasks. First there is one long text with eight multiple-choice questions, then a gapped text which you must complete by choosing the correct sentence, and a multiple-matching task. There is a wide range of different texts and all of them are about topics of general interest; you don't need any specialist knowledge to understand them.	The Reading and Use of English paper tests your reading skills and your knowledge and use of vocabulary and grammar. You will be assessed on: ▪ how well you can use a range of vocabulary and grammar ▪ a range of reading skills, including reading for detail, understanding opinions and feelings, understanding how a text is organised and understanding the main idea. You also need to be able to read a text quickly to get the general idea.



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam

Paper details	What's in the paper?	Skills assessed
Writing 1 hour 20 minutes	The Writing paper has two parts. The first is compulsory, and you must write an essay which shows your opinion about the topic, using two ideas you're given and one idea of your own. Then you have a choice of three questions, and you must choose one. You'll need to write an article, an email/letter, a report or a review.	You will be assessed using the criteria <i>Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language</i>. See page 13 for more detail.
Listening Approximately 40 minutes	There are four parts in the Listening paper, and there is a mixture of monologues (one speaker) and dialogues (two or more speakers). The tasks include answering multiple-choice questions about short and longer texts; completing notes while you listen to a longer text; and matching options to short monologues.	This paper tests different real-life listening skills, such as listening for information, opinion or detail, or listening for the general meaning of the whole text.
Speaking 14 minutes Paired: two (occasionally three) candidates together	The Speaking test starts with general conversation between the examiner and each candidate. Then you take turns to speak for about 1 minute about two photographs. In Part 3, you discuss a decision-making task with the other candidate. Finally you will discuss topics related to the task in Part 3.	You're tested on different aspects of speaking, such as pronunciation, how well you use grammar and vocabulary, how you organise your ideas and how well you participate in discussions with other people. See page 13 for more detail.

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.

- ➔ **Download a complete sample paper.**
- ➔ **Try a computer-based practice test.**
(Please note you will need to use the Firefox or Chrome browser to view these sample tests.)
- ➔ **Watch a video of a Speaking test.**
- ➔ **Read an examiner's comments on the candidates' performances.**

Before the exam – preparation

When you are preparing for the exam, you should get to know all the papers and tasks, so that you know what to expect on the day of the test. This will also help you to perform at your best – the exam tasks are carefully designed to let you show all your language skills, but you should also be fully prepared for everything you need to do in the exam. For example, in the Writing test you must keep in mind all the assessment criteria, so that you produce the best answers you can in the time allowed.

But practice tests alone aren't enough to help you perform really well. It's important to concentrate on improving your language skills and communicative ability, to give you the best chance of achieving your goal.

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

- tips and FAQs for each exam paper
- sample papers.

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.



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam





About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



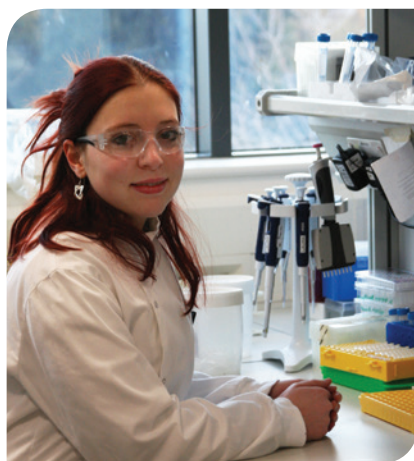
After
the exam

How much do you know about studying
for *Cambridge English: First*?

Can you answer these questions?

1. Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?
2. What kinds of things should I read to improve my reading skills?
3. What should I do if I don't understand some vocabulary when I'm reading?
4. How can I practise grammar and vocabulary to prepare for the test?
5. How will my writing be assessed?
6. How can I improve my writing for the Writing tasks?
7. What's the best way to improve my listening skills outside the classroom?
8. How will my speaking be assessed?
9. How can I develop my speaking skills?
10. How much time should I spend doing practice tests?

Find the answers on the next page



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My university recommended I take *Cambridge English: First*. Preparing for the exam gave me the confidence and language skills to travel internationally and get a job at a prestigious laboratory.

Anais Legent,
Cambridge English: First certificate holder and
Research Associate at Kymab Ltd

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ANSWERS

Studying for Cambridge English: First

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

You can download a sample paper and find more information about each part of the test on the **Cambridge English Language Assessment website**.

2. *What kinds of things should I read to improve my reading skills?*

The best way to improve your reading skills is to read as much as possible, and to read a wide range of different texts. This will also help you in the Writing paper.

Try reading:

- graded readers and short stories
- articles from newspapers and magazines
- informational texts such as travel websites or online encyclopaedias
- reviews of books, films or technology.

If you have a special interest or hobby, try reading about it in English as much as you can.

3. *What should I do if I don't understand some vocabulary when I'm reading?*

Generally, you should continue reading and try to understand as much as possible without worrying about what these words mean. If you always stop to check words you don't know, you can lose the general meaning. Also, in the exam, you can't use a dictionary, so this is an important skill to learn. Sometimes, when you read, however, your aim may be to improve your vocabulary. If there are words which you meet often, check their meaning then record them, with an example, in a vocabulary book.

4. *How can I practise grammar and vocabulary to prepare for the test?*

Reading a wide range of different texts will help you with aspects of English such as collocation (which words go together), phrasal verbs and how we use linkers. You'll also become more aware of the language used in written English and how writers use paraphrase. All of these are important for the Reading and Use of English paper, as well as the Writing paper.

It's also very helpful to use a monolingual dictionary while you're preparing for the exam. These dictionaries contain detailed information about how words and phrases are used, not just the meaning. This kind of information is helpful generally, and particularly when preparing for the Reading and Use of English paper.



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam

5. *How will my writing be assessed?*

You can find information about how *Cambridge English: First* examiners assess Writing [here](#).

6. *How can I improve my writing for the Writing tasks?*

One way is to use example answers, which you can find in **coursebooks or practice test books**. First of all, look at how the writer answers the different parts of the question. Then choose one of the assessment criteria to explore – perhaps an area that you find more difficult. If this is *Organisation*, look at how the writer organises their ideas into paragraphs. Think about how they develop these ideas, and how they link ideas in each paragraph and between the paragraphs. You can do similar things for *Language* and *Communicative Achievement*.

7. *What's the best way to improve my listening skills outside the classroom?*

Try to listen to as many different things as possible. There's a huge range of recordings and videos on the internet, such as video clips, podcasts, talks, TV channels, radio stations and also websites specially designed for English-language learners. As with reading, if you have an interest or hobby, try to find video clips or podcasts about it. You can also listen to our audio series **Virtually Anywhere**. Each of the seven episodes comes with activities so you can practise the language used.

8. *How will my speaking be assessed?*

You can find information about how *Cambridge English: First* examiners assess Speaking [here](#).

9. *How can I develop my speaking skills?*

Speak English as much as possible! Like all language skills, your speaking will improve if you practise more. Speak to different people, in different situations and about different topics. You can also practise for Part 2 of the Speaking test by recording yourself, and listening back to see what you could improve. It's also a good idea to watch a **sample Speaking test**, to give you an idea of what to expect.

10. *How much time should I spend doing practice tests?*

Doing practice tests is only one part of your preparation. You need to be familiar with all the tasks and question types of all the papers, so you know what to expect. However, you should balance this with lots of language and skills practice. Before you do any practice tests, make sure you know exactly what you need to do in each part. Don't try to memorise answers for the Writing or Speaking tests, because they probably won't answer the questions you're being asked. It's good to set yourself time limits when you do practice tests, so that you practise completing the tasks and filling in the answer sheet in the time you'll have in the exam.

You can find an **official book of practice tests** online or from bookshops. There are also **free sample tests on our website**.



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam

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

Can you answer these questions?

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

Find the answers on the next page



ANSWERS

Practical things to do before the exam

1. *How do I register for the exam or find a centre?*

If you are already at a school that offers a course in *Cambridge English: First*, speak to your school about your exam booking. If you are registering independently, you can find a centre that offers your exam [here](#). Then you can register directly with the exam centre. They will be able to give you advice about preparation, and tell you how much your exam will cost.

2. *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. The Speaking test is often taken on a different day from the other papers.

3. *What is the Notice to Candidates?*

The Notice to Candidates is a list of things you can and can't do in the exam room. Your exam centre will give you a copy, but you can also see a copy [here](#).

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

You must bring identification, for example your passport or national ID card. A bottle of water is a good idea. You can take pens and pencils, but your centre will also provide these.

5. *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. It also tells you your candidate ID number and secret number, which you will need to use to register to receive your results online. It's a good idea to register a few weeks before your exam.



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam



Exam day

It doesn't matter how well prepared you are, exam day can make anyone feel nervous. That's why it's really important to know what to expect on the day.

Do some practice tests and practise filling in the answer sheets for the Reading and Use of English paper and the Listening paper. You can practise this on the **sample test**. If you have any questions before the day of the test, contact your local centre. You can find your local centre **here**.

On the day of the test, your photograph will be taken at the centre. You may also be asked to fill in a sheet of candidate data. Don't worry – this helps us to keep accurate records of the ages and nationalities of people taking the exam, and to ensure our exams are fair for everyone.

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



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam





About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam

EXAM DAY TIPS

- ✓ The night before the exam, get a good night's sleep. Eat sensibly and take water with you, so you can concentrate on the tasks.
- ✓ Plan your timing carefully for the **Reading and Use of English** and **Writing** papers. Decide before the exam how long you want to spend on each task, and don't spend longer than that. You can always go back at the end if you have time.
- ✓ You can do the tasks in these papers in any order, so you may want to start with the questions you find easier. Make sure, though, that you write your answers correctly on the answer sheet.
- ✓ Allow enough time to plan, write and check your work in the **Writing** paper. If you make corrections, make sure they are clear. Don't worry about the exact number of words; just try to answer the question fully.
- ✓ In the **Listening** paper, always read the questions before you start listening. Don't worry if you miss a question – use the questions to help you find your place. You will hear each recording twice.
- ✓ In the **Speaking** test, it's fine to ask the examiner to repeat the question if you're not sure. Try to listen to your partner's comments and respond to them; this is part of good communication skills.



- ➔ Watch a video of a Speaking test.
- ➔ Read an examiner's comments on the candidates' performances.

After the exam



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



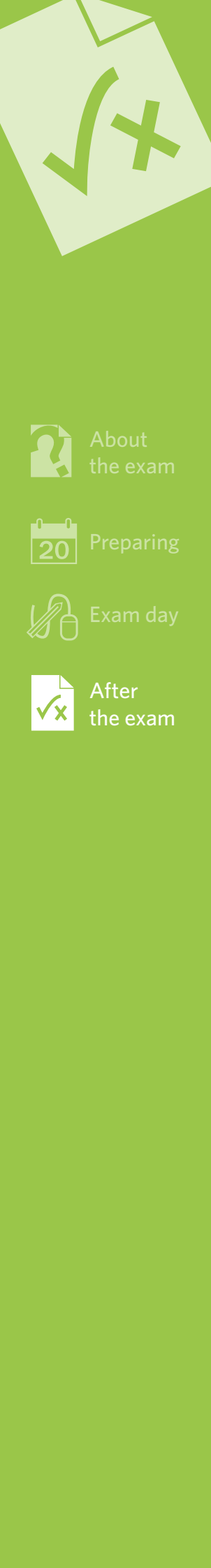
After
the exam

How much do you know about results and next steps?

Can you answer these questions?

1. *How is Writing assessed?*
2. *How is Speaking assessed?*
3. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*
4. *What happens if I don't pass one of the papers?*
5. *What does my overall score actually mean?*
6. *What is the online Results Verification Service?*
7. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*
8. *What can I do with my Cambridge English: First qualification?*
9. *How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: First?*

Find the answers on the next page



ANSWERS

Results and next steps

1. *How is Writing assessed?*

There are four assessment criteria for the Writing tasks: *Content*, *Communicative Achievement*, *Organisation* and *Language*.

- **Content** focuses on how well you have completed 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 (for example, is the style right for a magazine article?), and whether you have used the right register, for example formal or informal.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way you put together the piece of writing, in other words, if it's logical and ordered.
- **Language** focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

2. *How is Speaking assessed?*

There are two examiners in the Speaking exam. One is the interlocutor, who speaks to you and manages the test. The interlocutor will award you a mark for global achievement (a general mark for how well you did in the whole test). The other is the assessor, who only listens. The assessor uses four assessment criteria: *Grammar and Vocabulary*, *Discourse Management*, *Pronunciation* and *Interactive Communication*. For more details, [see these examiner's comments](#).

3. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*

On your Statement of Results you'll see your:

- score on the Cambridge English Scale for each of the four skills (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) and Use of English
- score on the Cambridge English Scale for the overall exam
- grade for the overall exam
- CEFR level for the overall exam.

4. *What happens if I don't pass one of the papers?*

You can't fail a paper; your overall score is based on how you perform in the whole exam. If you don't do very well in one paper, your Statement of Results will show this. However, if you have performed well enough in the other papers, you can still pass the exam.



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam



About
the exam



Preparing



Exam day



After
the exam

5. What does my overall score actually mean?

Your overall score for the exam is given on the Cambridge English Scale and shows how well you did in the exam. If you achieve a score of 180 or more (grade A), this means you performed exceptionally well and that your English is above Level B2, the level of *Cambridge English: First*. Your certificate will show that you received the *First Certificate in English* and that you showed ability at Level C1.

If you achieve a score between 160 and 179 (grade B or C) in the exam, you will receive the *First Certificate in English* at Level B2. If your performance is below Level B2, but within Level B1, you will get a Cambridge English certificate stating that you showed ability at Level B1.

6. What is the online Results Verification Service?

This service enables universities, colleges or employers to view and check exam results. If an institution wants to verify your result, you will need to give them your candidate ID number and secret number. If you have lost these details, the centre where you took your exam can provide them.

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

Statements of Results are released online, approximately four to six weeks after the exam for paper-based exams, and two to three weeks after the exam for computer-based exams. To receive your result online, you will need your candidate ID number and secret number. These can be found on the Confirmation of Entry sheet given to you by your centre. If you are successful in your exam, your certificate will be sent about three weeks after the results are available. If you need to check when you will receive your certificate, contact your centre.



8. What can I do with my Cambridge English: First qualification?

Cambridge English exams are officially accepted by thousands of universities, employers and **governments** globally. They can help you into higher education and improve job prospects. Because the exams are so well known all around the world, they can give you opportunities in other countries. **Find out more about who accepts Cambridge English exams here.**

9. How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: First?

Cambridge English: First shows that your English language ability is at B2 level. If you are serious about building your career opportunities or studying in an English-speaking university, you should consider working towards a qualification at C1 level. This will help you develop the skills for working, studying or living in English-speaking countries. Depending on your plans and area of expertise, you might want to prepare for **Cambridge English: Advanced** or **Cambridge English: Business Higher**. This **chart** shows the full range of Cambridge English exams and their CEFR level.



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Preparing for the exam was a very rewarding experience – I’m glad I went through it.

Bong Yang, Student, Malaysia

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