



Cambridge Assessment
English

Linguaskill 

from Cambridge

Alignment of Linguaskill to the CEFR through Standard Setting

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Standard setting refers to the process of establishing cut scores on examinations. The cut scores help divide examinees into proficiency groups based on their test performances. In the case of Linguaskill, cut scores are used to divide examinees into six proficiency groups in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018) or CEFR: Pre A1, A1, A2, B1, B2, and C1 and above. This process of linking test results to a theoretical framework of language proficiency is also called alignment, i.e., aligning the Linguaskill test to the CEFR.

Historically, Cambridge English exams were the basis for defining some CEFR levels. Brian North, one of the co-authors of the CEFR, points out that:

'... the process of defining these [CEFR] levels started in 1913 with the Cambridge Proficiency Exam (CPE) that defines a practical mastery of the language as a non-native speaker. This level has become C2. In 1939, Cambridge introduced the First Certificate (FCE), which is still seen as the first level of proficiency of interest for office work, now associated with B2.' (North, 2006, p. 6)

Because Cambridge English exams informed the development of the CEFR from the beginning, the links between these exams and the CEFR levels have always been well established. Similarly, new descriptors published in an update of the CEFR in 2018 were informed by Cambridge English's scales of score reporting. Therefore, Cambridge English's focus has been on maintaining the standards.

The alignment of Linguaskill to the CEFR was carried out in the following five stages in 2019–20:

1. Familiarisation (equipping expert judges with robust knowledge of the CEFR)
2. Specification (expert judgement on the relevance of the Linguaskill test to the CEFR)
3. Standardisation training (achieving consensus on performances and test tasks associated with each CEFR level)
4. Standard setting (determining cut scores)
5. Validation (collecting validity evidence about standard setting).

The standard setting approach used for the Linguaskill Reading and Listening tests, which assess receptive skills, was test-centred. In the test-centred approach, the judges reviewed the tasks in the test and decided on the level of performance on these tasks that would indicate successful achievement of the CEFR standards. In contrast, the standard setting approach adopted for the Linguaskill Writing and Speaking tests, which assess productive skills, was examinee-centred. Examinee-centred methods are based on the performance of a representative sample of real candidates, who were evaluated according to the CEFR standards, and whose Linguaskill test scores were used to set the cut scores.

Cambridge English views standard setting as a regular ongoing process in which the links between the exams and the CEFR are constantly monitored and maintained. So far, two Linguaskill standard setting exercises have been performed, one in 2017 and the other in 2019.



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