

Linguaskill▶▶

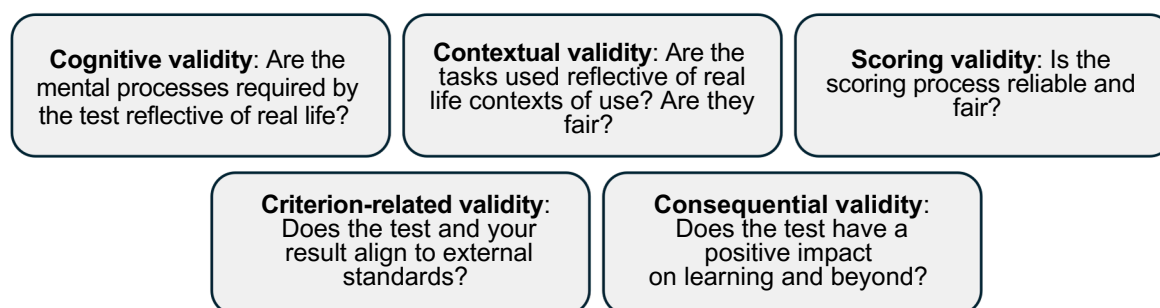
Speaking

For Linguaskill and Linguaskill Business

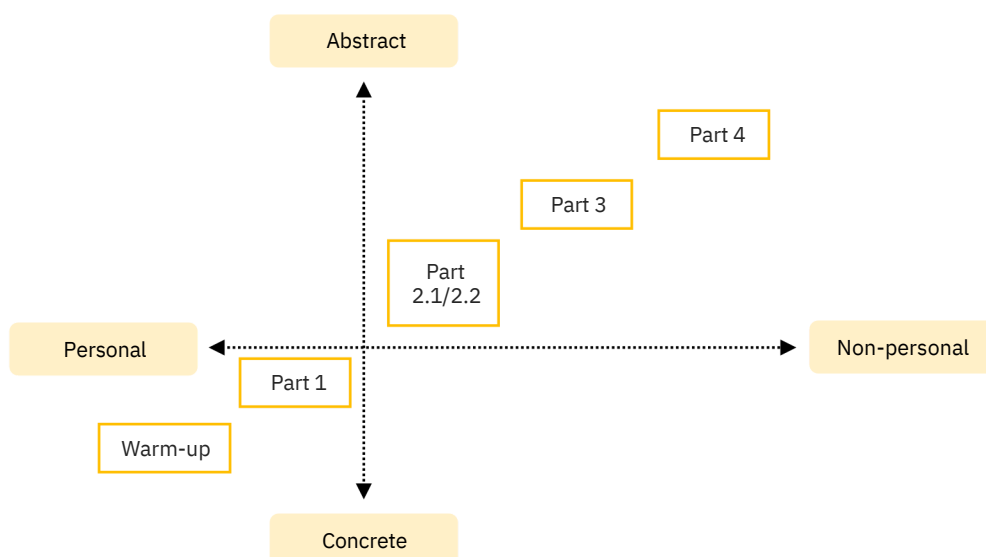


In order to provide evidence of how well Linguaskill measures what it is intended to measure, Cambridge aim to show how the test tasks relate to language activities in the real world in terms of how well they replicate those language behaviours in the target use domain (a mix of contextual and cognitive validity¹) and how well the tasks relate to concepts of language proficiency as illustrated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (criterion-related validity).

The theoretical framework that guides the test evaluation process for Linguaskill is Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive framework for language test validation. The framework is described as socio-cognitive in that "the abilities to be tested are demonstrated by the mental processing of the learner (the cognitive dimension); equally, the use of language in performing tasks is viewed as a *social* rather than a purely linguistic phenomenon" (Taylor, 2011, p.25). Below is an illustration of how the framework focuses on specific aspects of test validity.



These kinds of questions are considered extensively in the design, development and use of Linguaskill Speaking. In terms of cognition, tasks are informed by established models of cognition in the production of speech (Field, 2011) and provide a balance of more planned/unplanned tasks so as to reflect the cognitive demands of real speech.



¹ See *New Linguaskill Overview* document for more information on these terms and Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive framework which is used to guide the development of a validation argument for Linguaskill.

In terms of contextual factors, the tasks are carefully designed to elicit a range of discourse in different communicative contexts appropriate to the B1-C2 range. This can be seen in how the tasks move from a more personal and concrete focus to a more abstract one. This, in turn, helps ensure that the test is aligned with external standards like the CEFR in that it reflects the shift from a learner being able to describe themselves, their everyday experiences etc. to being able to provide detailed descriptions on complex subjects (Council of Europe, 2020). The table below provides an overview of functional foci and where the CEFR is an important reference point for what the test elicits.

Table 1

Part No.	Description	Functional foci	CEFR descriptors of relevance
Warm-up	Practice (unmarked)	Not applicable	Not applicable
Part 1	Presentation: text-based	- Naming/providing context for the targeted topic - Describing the targeted topic - Justifying opinion	- Overall oral production B1-C1 - General linguistic range B1-C1 - Sustained monologue: describing experience B1-C1
Part 2.1	Tutorial / meeting summary	- Conveying a minimum of two key points clearly and concisely - Producing a coherent and cohesive response within the allotted time	- Sustained monologue: Giving information B1-C1 - Overall mediation B1-C2 - Processing text in speech B1-C2 - Acting as an intermediary in informal situations B1-C2 - Addressing audiences B1-C2
Part 2.2	Discussion questions	- Responding to propositions using evaluative and speculative language. - Presenting own ideas with supporting reasons	- Addressing audiences B1-C1 - Sustained monologue: putting a case B1-C1 - Propositional precision B1-C2
Part 3	Recommendation	- Evaluating the relevance of visual information using speculative and/or hypothetical language - Relating recommendation to criteria outlined in text message input - Providing a final recommendation with justification	- Overall oral production B2-C2 - Addressing audiences B2-C2 - Sustained monologue: Giving information B2-C1 - Breaking down complicated information B2-C2 - Collaborating to construct meaning B2-C2 - Mediation: Relaying specific information in speech B2-C1 - Mediation: Processing text in speech B2-C1
Part 4	Critical response	- Giving supporting and counter arguments with justification - Formulating a chain of reasoned argument - Rounding off with an appropriate conclusion	- Overall oral production B2-C2 - General linguistic range B2-C2 - Sustained monologue: Putting a case B2-C1 - Addressing audiences B2-C1

In terms of scores, Cambridge trains, certificates and monitors Linguaskill examiners to ensure the scores they provide are accurate and fair. Examiner performance is carefully monitored to prevent inconsistencies in examining. Candidates are awarded a holistic mark for each test part but this is derived from the examiner considering specific sub-criteria (Table 2).

Table 2

Sub-criteria	Description
Pronunciation and Fluency	How clear and smooth is what the person is saying? For example, at a lower-level a speaker might hesitate or have a strong accent which makes them less easy to understand. At a higher level, their speech will be more fluent and easier to follow.
Language Resource	How good is the person's use of grammar and vocabulary? For example, at a lower level a speaker may use only single words or short phrases while at higher levels they are more able to use idiomatic expressions and collocations with increasing sophistication.
Discourse Management	How well does the person organise what they are saying for a listener? For example, at a lower level a speaker may struggle to link utterances together but at a higher level the contributions a speaker makes are part of a more complex string of ideas.

These sub-criteria are considered and then balanced against the extent to which the candidate has met the functional competencies inherent in the task (Table 1). It is via this process that Linguaskill Speaking aims to provide scores which are a fair reflection of both linguistic and broader communicative skills.

In addition to CEFR alignment being built into task development (e.g., via standardised item production procedures, pretesting etc.), Cambridge routinely conducts standard setting activities to ensure that exams are monitored for CEFR alignment (e.g., Lopes & Cheung, 2020).

While it is impossible to measure the impact of New Linguaskill prior to it going live, studies of the original Linguaskill exam point to positive consequences in terms of achievement of career goals and increased employability (Khalifa et al., 2014) also ease-of-use and accuracy of reporting (Ismail et al., 2020). Research into the impact of the test will be routinely conducted as it grows in use to ensure it is having a positive influence on stakeholders.

References

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