

## Writing

For Linguaskill and Linguaskill Business

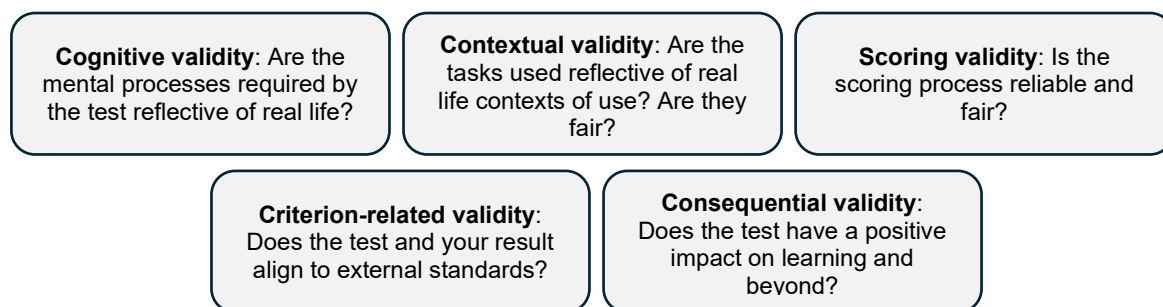


## Introduction

Linguaskill is a modular online multi-level test of English language proficiency produced by Cambridge. One of the components is a test of Writing.

To provide evidence that Linguaskill effectively measures what it is intended to, Cambridge seeks to demonstrate how the test tasks reflect real-world language use. This involves showing how well the tasks replicate the kinds of language behaviours found in the target use domain—capturing both contextual and cognitive aspects of validity—and how closely they align with recognised models of language proficiency, such as those described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), supporting 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 Writing. The Linguaskill Writing test is designed to assess written English proficiency in academic and professional contexts. It is suitable for adult learners at CEFR levels B1 to C2. The test is delivered online and consists of two parts: Part 1 (email) and Part 2 (extended writing). The extended writing consists of an essay in standard Linguaskill and a report in the Business variant.

The total duration of the test is 55 minutes. The suggested timing for Part 1 is 15 minutes and for Part 2 it is 40 minutes.

The Part 1 email contributes 25% of the final candidate mark, the Part 2 extended writing contributes 75% of the final candidate mark.

## Tasks

In terms of cognition, the tasks are informed by established models of cognition in the production of writing (Kellogg, 1996) to reflect the cognitive demands of writing in academic and professional contexts. The combination of email and an extended writing (essay or report) helps ensure the tests elicit relevant cognitive engagement in the communicative tasks.

In terms of context validity, the email genre is highly domain-relevant because it mirrors the kinds of written communication people engage in daily—whether in academic, professional, or personal contexts (e.g., de Corbière et al., 2012). Writing emails involves responding to prompts, conveying information clearly, and adjusting tone and register appropriately, all of which are essential communicative skills. Mirroring the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2020), the inclusion of the email genre alongside the extended writing (essay or report) is predicated on the distinction which can be drawn “between transaction and interpersonal language use, and between interpersonal and ideational language use” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 33). The email is a more transactional and interpersonal genre and aims to elicit language with a greater emphasis on writer presence and the creation of rapport which are essential in drawing a reader into a message (see Fu, 2012; Zhang, 2016).

Similarly, the essay genre holds obvious relevance in academic contexts because it reflects a core communicative practice across disciplines in higher education. As Gardner and Nesi (2012) show in their analysis of the BAWE corpus, the essay is the most prevalent genre family in university student writing, used widely to assess students’ ability to construct coherent arguments, engage critically with ideas, and demonstrate disciplinary knowledge. Essays typically require students to take a position, support it with evidence, and structure their ideas logically—skills that are central to academic success.

The report genre is most domain-relevant to more professional contexts, particularly within business and management education. Reports are widely used to simulate real-world decision-making scenarios, requiring students or professionals to analyse data, evaluate options, and make recommendations. As Nathan (2013) shows, business case reports are a staple of business school curricula, reflecting authentic workplace practices and often requiring writers to adopt professional roles such as consultants or managers. Yeung (2007) further highlights that reports are structured around practical concerns rather than theoretical ones, with a strong emphasis on recommendations, evaluative language, and rational argumentation—features that distinguish them from more epistemic genres like research articles.

**Table 1** *Aspects of writing*

Aspects of writing	Narrative writing	Expository writing
Genre description	Agent-oriented, people-oriented, chronological	Topic-oriented, ideas, claims, and arguments Persuasive, compare and contrast, argumentative, procedural texts
Lexical features	Personal pronouns, sensory images	Advanced vocabulary, less frequent vocabulary, abstract, complex, multi-syllabic words
Syntactic features	Shorter clauses, less complex phrases, more active voice	Longer clauses, more complex noun phrases, more relative and adverbial clauses, more passive voice
Cognitive load	Less cognitive effort	More cognitive effort, more planning time, more sophisticated knowledge-transforming strategy

Table 1 (adapted from Jeong, 2017) provides a useful contrast between narrative and expository writing research insights. As both extended writing tasks elicit expository texts, they focus on “more formal types of transactional and evaluative writing” described in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020, p.68) and which are also highly valued in professional and academic settings (Crowhurst, 1990). In adopting these expository genre tasks the writing component tries to reflect real-world writing (contextual validity) while also giving candidates

in the B1-C2 levels appropriate opportunities to show their language abilities<sup>1</sup>. Across both parts of the test, there is every commitment to ensuring tasks are authentic and construct-relevant.

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 produce “straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects” to being able to produce “well-structured texts of complex subjects” (Council of Europe, 2020, p.66). The table below provides an overview of functional foci and where the CEFR is an important reference point for what the test elicits.

**Table 2** *Test parts, functional foci and connections to the CEFR*

Genre	Functional foci	CEFR descriptors of relevance
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchanging information: Responding to prompts such as emails, notices, announcements, or workplace updates.</li> <li>Requesting and confirming details: Asking for information, clarifying arrangements, or confirming actions.</li> <li>Expressing evaluation or emotion: Highlighting personal or professional significance, showing appreciation or concern.</li> <li>Managing tone and register: Adjusting language appropriately for formal, semi-formal, or interpersonal contexts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall written interaction (B1-C2)</li> <li>Correspondence (B1-C2)</li> <li>General linguistic range (B1-C2)</li> <li>Vocabulary control (B1-C2)</li> <li>Grammatical accuracy (B1-C2)</li> <li>Thematic development (B1-C2)</li> <li>Coherence and cohesion (B1-C2)</li> <li>Propositional precision (B1-C2)</li> <li>Sociolinguistic appropriateness (B1-C2)</li> </ul>
Essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stating and justifying own view: indicating extent of agreement with proposition statement</li> <li>Discussing and evaluating arguments for and against the proposition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall written production (B1-C2)</li> <li>Reports and essays (B1-C2)</li> <li>General linguistic range (B1-C2)</li> <li>Vocabulary control (B1-C2)</li> <li>Grammatical accuracy (B1-C2)</li> <li>Thematic development (B1-C2)</li> <li>Coherence and cohesion (B1-C2)</li> <li>Propositional precision (B1-C2)</li> <li>Sociolinguistic appropriateness (B1-C2)</li> </ul>
Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stating and justifying own view: providing recommendations</li> <li>Discussing and evaluating benefits and issues of a policy/situation</li> </ul>	

From a CEFR perspective (Council of Europe, 2020), email writing taps specifically into written interaction scales. For example, at B1, learners are expected to “write personal letters giving news and expressing thoughts about abstract or cultural topics” (p. 83) while at B2, they should be able to “write letters conveying degrees of emotion and highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences” (Ibid.). In professional contexts, descriptors at C1 include the ability to “express oneself with clarity and precision in correspondence, using language flexibly and effectively.” The Linguaskill email tasks reflect these descriptors by requiring candidates to respond to realistic scenarios—such as requesting course information or justifying a business decision—thus providing evidence of their ability to manage written interaction in a structured, purposeful way. This alignment ensures that the Part 1 tasks are appropriately calibrated to CEFR levels.

Similarly, the essay and report genres adopted in Part 2, reflects how learners at B1+ are expected to be able to “produce short, simple essays on topics of interest” (p. 68). Then, at B2, they are expected to be able to “Can produce an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining

<sup>1</sup> As Jeong (2017) suggests, while expository texts are challenging for lower-level learners – they can provide a fairer and more stable basis for assessments in multi-level testing situations.

the advantages and disadvantages of various options” (Ibid.). Essays and reports provide an ideal platform for demonstrating these abilities, as they require structured reasoning, genre awareness, and the ability to communicate complex ideas clearly and persuasively.

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 single mark but this is derived from the examiner considering specific criteria (Table 3). Examiners mark test parts separately to ensure fairness and avoid more holistic assessments of ability.

**Table 3** *Glossary of scoring criteria*

Criteria	Description
<b>Communicative Achievement</b>	How well does the writing use genre and sociolinguistic conventions to communicate straightforward and complex ideas in ways that are appropriate to the intended audience? For example, a higher-proficiency writer will show greater control, flexibility and sophistication in how they convey ideas in genre-appropriate ways.
<b>Organisation</b>	How well does the writer use organisational devices to create cohesive and coherent texts? For example, a lower-proficiency writer may rely on a more limited repertoire of linking words (e.g., but) whereas at higher levels the writer will use more subtle means to bring themes and points into contrast.
<b>Language</b>	How well does the writer to use their knowledge of lexis and grammar to successfully convey meaning? For example, as a writer develops they are more able to use complex lexico-grammatical structures (e.g. the use of more complex noun phrases or more specialised lexis).

These criteria are considered individually and then combined. It is via this process that Linguaskill Writing aims to provide scores which are a fair reflection of both linguistic and broader communicative skills.

The Linguaskill Writing test comprises two distinct tasks that together provide a balanced assessment of a candidate’s writing ability. To reflect the relative demands and contributions of each task, the scoring is weighted so that Part 1 accounts for 25% of the total mark and Part 2 accounts for 75%.

This weighting is informed by several factors. First, the two tasks differ significantly in scope and complexity. Part 1 is a shorter, functional writing task—typically an email—requiring a minimum of 50 words and completed in 15 minutes. Part 2, by contrast, is a longer and more open-ended essay or report task, requiring at least 250 words and completed in 40 minutes. The greater length and linguistic demands of Part 2 mean it is better suited to eliciting the full range of writing ability, particularly at higher CEFR levels such as C1 and C2. The weighting also aligns with practical considerations. The time and word count allocated to each task suggest a natural ratio in favour of Part 2. This mirrors practices in other high-stakes writing assessments, such as IELTS, where longer tasks are given proportionally more weight in the final score. Taken together, these considerations support a scoring structure that gives appropriate emphasis to each task’s role in assessing writing proficiency, while maintaining the validity and reliability of the test as a whole.

## CEFR alignment and impact

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 Linguaskill prior to it going live, studies of the previous 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.

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