

Cambridge English First

Cambridge English: First (FCE) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Is there a wordlist for Cambridge English: First exams?

No. Examinations that are at CEFR Level B2 (independent user), or above – such as *Cambridge English: First* – do not have particular language specifications or vocabulary lists.

Do I have to pass each paper in order to pass the whole examination?

No. 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.

Reading and Use of English

DO

- ✓ Read the sources, titles and subtitles of the texts where given; they are there to help you.
- ✓ Read the words following the gaps in Parts 1 and 2 as they may have an effect on the answer.
- ✓ Remember that the words you need to write in Part 3 might have to change into a negative or a plural.
- ✓ Write between two and five words as your answer in Part 4.
- ✓ Read the questions carefully and check each option against the text before rejecting it (Part 5).
- ✓ Check the words around the gap carefully (Part 6). The missing word(s) may be forming part of an idiom, fixed phrase or collocation.
- ✓ Check that the completed paragraph makes sense in the passage as a whole (Part 6). The missing sentence must fit the overall context.
- ✓ Keep the development of the text in mind.
- ✓ Read each text carefully before you answer the questions to get an overall impression and understanding of it. This includes Part 7, the multiple-matching task.
- ✓ Check your spelling in all parts of the test.
- ✓ Make sure that you transfer your answers to the answer sheet accurately.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't try to answer any questions without referring carefully to the text.
- ✗ Don't spend too much time on any one part of the paper.
- ✗ Don't forget to record your answers on the separate answer sheet.
- ✗ Don't assume that if the same word appears in the text as well as in an option, this means you have located the answer.
- ✗ Don't write the answers to any of the examples on your answer sheets.
- ✗ Don't choose your answer in Part 1 before you have read all the options.

- ✗ Don't write out the full sentence when answering the questions in Part 4.
- ✗ Don't leave the base word in Part 3 unchanged.
- ✗ Don't decide on your answer before reading the whole of a sentence in all parts.
- ✗ Don't give alternative answers for any questions.

Will I get one or two scores for the Reading and Use of English paper?

Your Statement of Results will show two scores for this paper – one for Reading and one for Use of English. They are equally important when calculating your overall score.

How are the separate scores for Reading and Use of English determined?

On your Statement of Results and your certificate, you receive a Cambridge English Scale score for Reading and a separate Cambridge English Scale score for Use of English (as well as Writing, Listening and Speaking). On the Reading and Use of English paper, the Reading score is derived from Parts 1, 5, 6 and 7, and the Use of English score is derived from Parts 2, 3 and 4.

What aspects of reading does this paper test?

You will need to show that you can understand specific information, main idea, text organisation and structure, tone, gist, opinion, attitude, detail and purpose. You will also need to be able to deal with occasional unknown vocabulary.

How long should I spend on each part?

Within this 75-minute paper, there is no time limit for each task. Some tasks may take longer than others and you should be aware of how long you need for different tasks. However, remember that each of the seven parts is worth approximately the same number of marks overall. Doing some [practice tests](#) should help you with timing your answers.

How do I write my answers for the Reading and Use of English paper?

Write your answers on the answer sheet provided by filling in boxes or by writing words (between two and five words are allowed for answers in Part 4). Make sure that you fill in the answers clearly. Your answer sheet will be scanned into a computer. You must transfer your answers within the time given for the paper (75 minutes).

What is the range of text types in each part of the Reading and Use of English paper?

It is possible for any of the following text types to appear in any part of the paper: newspaper and magazine articles, reports, fiction, advertisements, letters, messages, informational material (e.g. brochures, guides, manuals). Make sure that you are familiar with all these text types and with the different test focuses for each part. Appropriate tasks are selected to suit the individual text.

How do I fill in the answer sheet correctly?

You should use a pencil and not a pen. For Parts 1, 5, 6 and 7 mark ONE letter for each question. In Parts 2, 3 and 4 write your answer clearly in capital letters and in Parts 2 and 3 write one letter in each box. If you make a mistake you can use an eraser and rub it out.

Will I lose marks for incorrect answers?

No. You will not lose marks if you give an incorrect answer. If you give a wrong answer, it is the same as giving no answer – you get no marks for that question. If you're not sure about an answer, it is better to guess than to leave the question blank.

How important is spelling?

All spelling must be correct in the Reading and Use of English paper. You will not get a mark for answers that are not spelled correctly. American spelling is allowed if used consistently.

If I think there are two possible answers to one question, can I write them both?

You should write only one answer for each question.

Are words like 'doesn't' and 'isn't' counted as one or two words?

Two words. To count the number of words, the full form should be taken into account, e.g. *didn't* = *did not* = two words.

What if I use a plural instead of a singular, or the other way round, in the word formation task (Part 3)?

A singular in an answer where a plural is required is marked as incorrect (and the other way round). You are expected to look at indicators in the text to decide whether a singular or plural form is appropriate.

What happens if I make one small mistake in the key word transformation task (Part 4)? Does it mean I get zero points?

The two parts of the sentence are always treated separately, so you will receive 1 mark for correctly completing one part of the sentence, even if a small mistake means that you get no points for other part.

Example: *The last time Enrico saw Gloria was the day they left school.*

SEEN

Enrico has the day they left school.

Answer: *not/ n't seen Gloria][since*

Writing

DO

- ✓ Read the whole question thoroughly and underline important parts.
- ✓ Make a plan for each answer, including ALL points.
- ✓ Expand the points using relevant ideas and information.
- ✓ Write in paragraphs whenever appropriate.
- ✓ Use a range of vocabulary, even if you are unsure of the correct spelling.
- ✓ Check tense endings, plural forms and word order in sentences.
- ✓ Check irregular past tenses and question formation.
- ✓ Use language that is appropriately formal or informal for the task.
- ✓ Choose a question you feel confident you can write about in Part 2.
- ✓ Write clearly so that the examiner can read your answer.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't misspell key words that appear on the question paper.
- ✗ Don't use the exact words from the question paper too much.
- ✗ Don't mix formal and informal language.
- ✗ Don't use formal linkers in an informal letter.

- ✗ Don't waste time writing addresses for a letter as they are not required.
- ✗ Don't worry if you run slightly over the word limit.

How many texts do I need to write?

Two. There is one task in Part 1, and a choice of tasks in Part 2.

How long should I spend on each part?

This is up to you. However, remember that both parts are worth the same number of marks. You should allow time for planning before you start writing each task, and for checking your work after you have finished. Overall the paper lasts 1 hour 20 minutes.

In what ways is Part 1 different from Part 2?

Part 1	Part 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One compulsory task. ▪ Before you start writing you will need to read material of up to 120 words. ▪ You always need to write an essay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A choice of tasks. ▪ The instructions are shorter. ▪ There is a range of different text types to choose from.

Where do I write my answers?

In the candidate answer booklet. Your test centre will also provide paper on which you can do rough work.

How is the Writing paper marked?

Your Writing paper will be marked by a trained examiner working with a Team Leader and Principal Examiner. Each examiner is randomly given tests to mark from all the entries. In this way, examiners will be assessing scripts from a variety of centres and countries.

How are extended responses in Writing assessed?

Examiners mark tasks using assessment scales developed with explicit reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The scales, which are used across the Cambridge English General and Business English Writing tests, are made up of four subscales:

- **Content** focuses on how well the candidate has fulfilled the task – if they have done what they were asked to do.
- **Communicative achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the task and whether the candidate has used the appropriate register.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way the candidate puts together the piece of writing: in other words, whether it is logical and ordered.
- **Language** focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

Each response is marked from 0 to 5 on each of the four subscales, and these scores are combined to give a final mark for the Writing paper.

What if I write too little/too much?

You are given guidelines in the paper about how much to write to help you plan your writing. If you write too much, you will only lose marks if you include things that are not relevant or would have a negative effect on the intended audience. If you write too little, but still include all the information required, you will not lose marks.

Is the report format obligatory for the 'report' in the Writing paper?

Reports should be clearly organised and may contain headings. The report format is not obligatory, but will make a good impression on the target reader if used appropriately. The mark awarded for the report will, however, depend on how the report meets the requirements.

Are addresses to be left out when writing a letter?

If you choose to write a letter, you do not need to include postal addresses. Whether you do or don't include an address will not affect your marks.

Listening

DO

- ✓ Listen to and read the instructions throughout the test. Make sure that you understand what you are listening for and what you have to do.
- ✓ Use the preparation time before each recording is played to read through the question and think about the context.
- ✓ Use the information on the page to help you follow the text.
- ✓ Look carefully at what is printed before and after the gap in Part 2 and think about the kind of information that you are listening for.
- ✓ Write only the missing information on the answer sheet (Part 2).
- ✓ Write your answers as clearly as possible.
- ✓ Check your answer the second time you hear a recording if you have an idea of the correct answer the first time round.
- ✓ Answer all the questions, even if you're not sure.
- ✓ Transfer your answers accurately to the answer sheet.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't rephrase what you hear in Part 2; write down the exact word(s) or figure(s) that you hear on the recording.
- ✗ Don't complicate your answer by writing extra, irrelevant information (Part 2).
- ✗ Don't spend too much time on a question you are having difficulty with as you may miss the next question.
- ✗ Don't rush to choose an answer just because you hear one word or phrase – concentrate on the overall meaning (Parts 1, 3 and 4).

What aspects of listening are tested in the Listening paper?

You will be tested on your understanding of gist, main points, detail and specific information, and your ability to deduce meaning, opinion and attitude. You will listen to monologues and interacting speakers from a variety of sources.

How many times will I hear each recording?

You will hear each recording twice.

How do I record my answers?

You must write all your answers on a separate answer sheet. You may write on the question paper as you listen, but you must transfer your answers to the answer sheet. You will have 5 minutes at the end of the test to do this.

Does it matter if I make spelling mistakes?

In *Cambridge English: First*, minor spelling mistakes are not penalised, but your intention must be clear. You will not be asked to spell words that are above this level. However, where a word has been spelled out letter by letter, e.g. a proper name, and where this would actually be a test of your ability to follow the spelling, the spelling must be correct.

Am I supposed to write the words I hear in the recording in my answers to Part 2, or do I get more marks if I use my own words?

You should try to use the actual words you hear in the recording. You do not get more marks for using your own words.

Can I wear headphones for the Listening paper?

Ask your centre whether you can use headphones or not – it depends how they choose to run the test.

Speaking

DO

- ✓ Make sure that you are familiar with what happens, and what skills you need to show, in each part of the test.
- ✓ Practise speaking English as much as possible in groups and in pairs, both inside and outside the classroom.
- ✓ Listen carefully to the instructions and questions during the test and respond appropriately.
- ✓ Speak clearly so that both the interlocutor and assessor can hear you.
- ✓ Use all the opportunities you're given in the test to speak, and extend your responses whenever possible.
- ✓ Ask for clarification of instructions or a question if you're not sure.
- ✓ Be prepared to initiate discussion as well as responding to what your partner says.
- ✓ Make full use of the time so that the examiner who is listening hears plenty of your English.
- ✓ Listen to your partner when it is their turn to speak.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't prepare long answers in advance, or learn and practise speeches.
- ✗ Don't try to dominate your partner or interrupt them abruptly during the Speaking test.
- ✗ Don't leave long or frequent pauses.
- ✗ Don't worry if you are being interrupted by the examiner. This shows that you have spoken enough. The tests have to keep to the time limit for administrative reasons.

Can I do the Speaking test with another student from my school?

This depends on the centre. In some centres, candidates from the same school do the Speaking test together. In other centres, where candidates from several different schools do the test at the same time, you may have a partner from another school. Check this with your test centre.

Do my partner and I speak to each other as well as to the examiner?

Yes. In Parts 1 and 2, you speak to the interlocutor (the examiner who speaks to you) but in Part 3, you must discuss something with the other candidate. In this part, you must speak to each other and not to the interlocutor. In Part 4, you can speak to the interlocutor or to your partner, or to both.

Do both examiners speak throughout the test?

No. There are two examiners: an interlocutor and an assessor. The interlocutor is the examiner who speaks to you and passes you examination materials. The assessor will only say hello and goodbye to you.

Does knowing your partner make it easier to do well?

There is no evidence that knowing your partner helps you to perform better, or worse, in the Speaking test. Some people feel more relaxed and confident when they do the test with someone they know, but other candidates may find this situation difficult or unnatural. In both cases, the examiners are trained to give all candidates equal opportunities to show their abilities.

What if the two candidates have very different personalities, e.g. one is very shy and one is very outgoing?

Examiners are trained to manage this situation and ensure that everyone has an equal chance to show their abilities during the test. However, you must try to make the best use of the time to show the examiners your language skills without dominating your partner.

What should I do if I don't understand the instructions?

Ask the examiner to repeat the instructions.

What happens when there is only one candidate left at the end of a Speaking test session?

This is avoided by examining the last three candidates together as a group.

For more information about *Cambridge English: First*, visit our website:

www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/first