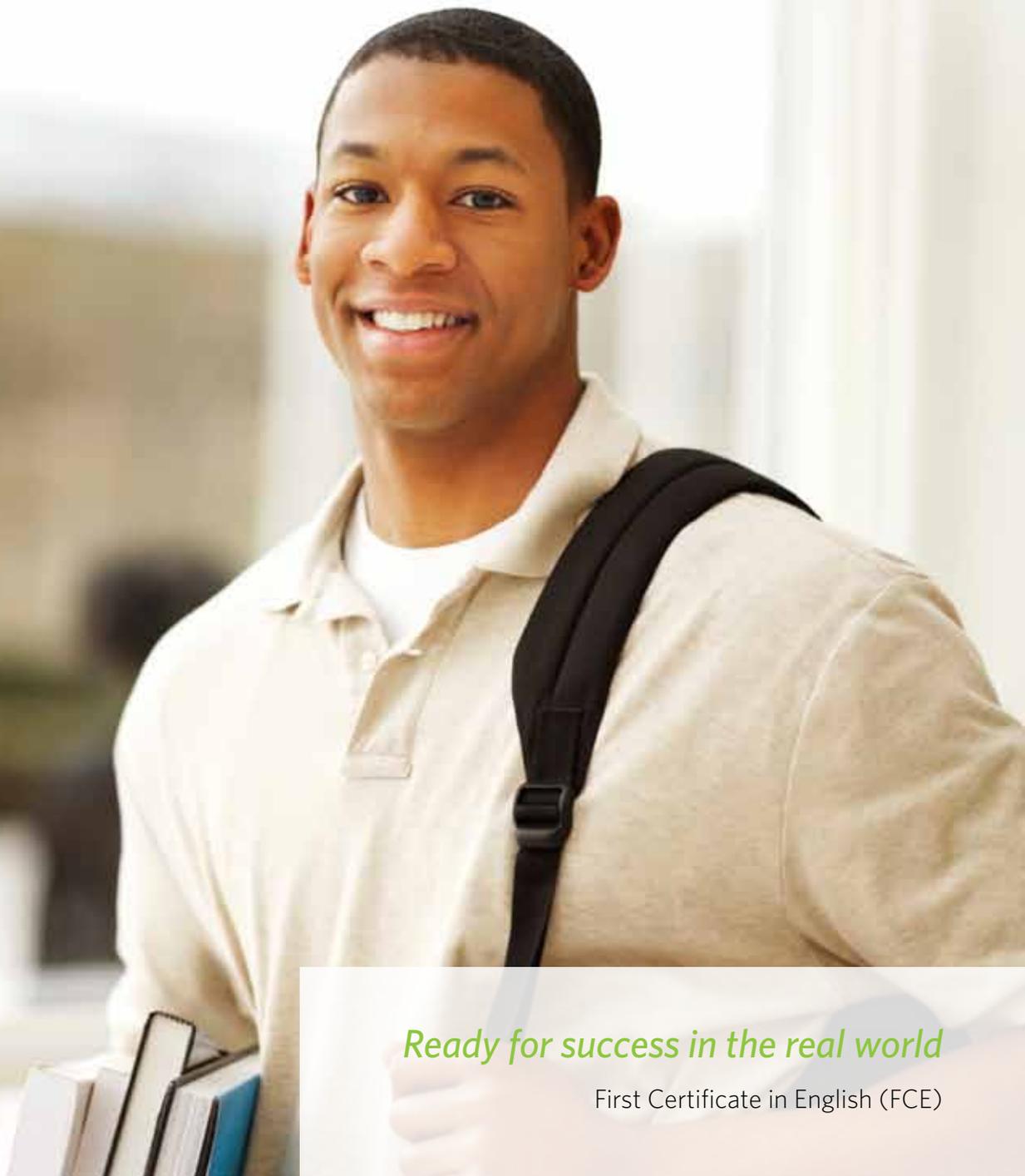




**CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH**  
Language Assessment  
Part of the University of Cambridge

# Cambridge English First

Information for candidates



*Ready for success in the real world*

First Certificate in English (FCE)

## How to use this guide

You can print this document if you wish, but the best way to use *Information for candidates* is 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.

# What does Cambridge English: First involve?

*Cambridge English: First* is for learners who have an upper-intermediate ability in English, at Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is recognised 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.

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

Paper details	What's in the paper?	Skills assessed
<b>Reading</b> 1 hour 20% of total marks	There are three parts in the Reading paper. There is one long text with eight multiple-choice questions, a gapped text which you must complete by choosing the correct sentence, and a multiple-matching activity. There is a wide range of different texts and all of them are about interesting topics; you don't need any specialist knowledge to understand them.	You need a range of reading skills, including reading for detailed comprehension, understanding opinions and feelings, understanding how a text is organised and understanding the main idea of a text. You also need to be able to read a text quickly to get the general idea.
<b>Writing</b> 1 hour 20 minutes 20% of total marks	The Writing paper has two parts. The first is compulsory, and you must write a letter or email which responds to a text and some notes. Then you have a choice of five questions, and you must choose one. Two of the questions are always about a set text (a story or film), which you can read or watch and prepare before the exam. <b>Find out what the set texts are here.</b>	You will be assessed using the criteria <i>Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language</i> . <a href="#">See page 10</a> for more detail.
<b>Use of English</b> 45 minutes 20% of total marks	This paper tests how well you can use vocabulary and grammar. 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 1 and 3 mainly test your knowledge of vocabulary. Part 2 mainly tests your knowledge of grammar. Part 4 tests both vocabulary and grammar, especially when paraphrasing.
<b>Listening</b> Approximately 40 minutes 20% of total marks	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.
<b>Speaking</b> 14 minutes Paired: two candidates together 20% of total marks	The Speaking test starts with general conversation between the examiner and each candidate. Then you take turns to speak for 1 minute about two photographs. In Part 3, the two candidates discuss a decision-making task together. Finally you will discuss topics related to the task in Part 3.	You are 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. <a href="#">See page 10</a> for more detail.

- [Download a complete sample paper here.](#)
- [Try a computer-based practice test here.](#)
- [Watch a video of a Speaking test here.](#)
- [Read an examiner's comments on the candidates' performances here.](#)

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## 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 is a range of **free exam preparation resources**, including:

- tips and FAQs for each exam paper
- sample papers and a computer-based practice test
- links to **further books for study**.

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.



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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 will my writing be assessed?
5. How can I improve my writing for the Writing tasks?
6. How can reading help me with the Use of English paper?
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

## 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 [here](#), and the [Cambridge English Language Assessment website](#) has more information. If you are taking a computer-based exam, [you can try a computer-based practice test here](#).

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 and Use of English papers. 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 purpose 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 will my writing be assessed?*

[Click here](#) for information about how *Cambridge English: First* examiners assess Writing.

5. *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*.



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### 6. *How can reading help me with the Use of English paper?*

If you read a lot, and a wide range of different texts, it will help you with aspects of English such as collocation (words which 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 paraphrasing. All of these are important for the Use of English paper, as well as the Reading and Writing papers.

It is also very helpful to use a monolingual dictionary while you are 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 Use of English paper.

### 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 is 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.

### 8. *How will my speaking be assessed?*

**Click here** for information about how *Cambridge English: First* examiners assess Speaking.

### 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 using podcasting or video websites to record yourself, and listen back to see what you could improve. The official **Online Speaking Practice** will help to improve your speaking skills and exam technique. 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 almost certainly 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 **official books of practice tests online** or from bookshops. There is also a **free sample test** available online.

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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



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## 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 for *Cambridge English: First*, speak to your school about your exam booking. If you are registering independently, [click here](#) and find a centre that offers your exam. 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 your passport for identification. 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 ID number and secret number, which you will need to use to register to receive your results online. It is a good idea to register a few weeks before your exam - we may send you useful information and important updates by email.



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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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## 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, Use of English and Listening papers; 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 that 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**.

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## EXAM DAY TIPS

- ✓ The night before the exam, get a good night's sleep. Eat sensibly before your exam, and take water with you, so you can concentrate on the tasks.
- ✓ Plan your timing carefully for the Reading, Writing and Use of English 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 transfer the answers correctly onto 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 **here**.
- Read an examiner's comments on the candidates' performances **here**.

## After the exam

How much do you know about results and the 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 grade 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



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### Results and the 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?

You'll see your grade, your score out of 100, and your own 'candidate profile'. This shows your performance in each paper and whether it was 'Exceptional', 'Good', 'Borderline' or 'Weak'. You can find more information in our document [Understanding your Statement of Results](#).

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

You can't fail a paper; your grade 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.

#### 5. What does my grade actually mean?

Your grade shows how well you did in the exam. If you achieved a grade A, this means you performed exceptionally well and that your English is above B2 level, 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 grade B or C in the exam, you will receive the *First Certificate in English* at Level B2. If your performance is below B2 level, but within B1 level, you will get a Cambridge English certificate stating that you showed ability at Level B1.



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## 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 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. We will then despatch your certificate to your centre up to a month after your result is available online (or two weeks for computer-based tests). 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.



“ 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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