Introduction

TO THE STUDENT

This book is for candidates preparing for the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) Business English Certificate Higher Level examination. It contains four complete tests which have been updated to reflect the most recent specifications (introduced in March 2002).

The BEC Suite

The Business English Certificates (BEC) are certificated examinations which can be taken on up to six fixed dates per year at approved Cambridge BEC centres. They are aimed primarily at individual learners who wish to obtain a business-related English language qualification and provide an ideal focus for courses in Business English. Set in a business context, BEC tests English language, not business knowledge. BEC is available at three levels – Preliminary, Vantage and Higher.

BEC Higher

Within the three levels, BEC Higher is at Cambridge Level 4.

Cambridge Level 4 BEC Higher
Cambridge Level 3 BEC Vantage
Cambridge Level 2 BEC Preliminary

The exam is based on the former Business English Certificate 3, which has been revised to keep pace with changes in business practice and language teaching and testing, and renamed.

The BEC Higher examination consists of four papers:

Reading and Writing	1 hour
Writing	1 hour 10 minutes
Listening	40 minutes (approximately)
Speaking	16 minutes

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Test of Reading

This paper consists of six parts with 52 questions, which take the form of two multiple matching tasks, two multiple choice tasks, a cloze test and an error identification task. Part 1 contains five short texts or a longer text divided into five sections, and Parts 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 each contain one longer text. The texts are taken from newspapers, business magazines, business correspondence, books, leaflets, brochures, etc. They are all business related, and are selected to test a wide range of reading skills and strategies.

Test of Writing

For this paper, candidates are required to produce two pieces of Writing. For Part 1, they write a short report based on graphic input. For Part 2, they choose whether to write a piece of business correspondence, a short report or a proposal. Candidates are asked to write 120 to 140 words for Part 1 and 200 to 250 words for Part 2. Assessment is based on achievement of task, range and accuracy of vocabulary and grammatical structures, organisation, content and appropriacy of register and format.

Test of Listening

This paper consists of three parts with 30 questions, which take the form of a note completion task, a multiple matching task and a multiple choice task. Part 1 contains a monologue in a work-related situation, Part 2 contains five very short monologues, and Part 3 contains one longer conversation between two or more people. The texts are audio-recordings based on a variety of sources including interviews, face to face conversations and documentary features. They are all business related, and are selected to test a wide range of listening skills and strategies.

Test of Speaking

The Speaking Test consists of three parts, which take the form of an interview section, a short talk on a business topic, and a discussion. Candidates are examined in pairs by two examiners, an Interlocutor and an Assessor. The Assessor awards a mark based on the following criteria: Grammar and Vocabulary, Discourse Management, Pronunciation and Interactive Communication. The Interlocutor provides a global mark for the whole test.

Marks and results

The four BEC Higher papers total 120 marks, after weighting. Each paper is weighted to 30 marks. A candidate's overall grade is based on the total score gained in all four papers. It is not necessary to achieve a satisfactory level in all four papers in order to pass the examination. Pass grades are A, B or C, with A being the highest. D and E are failing grades. Every candidate is provided with a Statement of Results which includes a graphical display of their performance in each paper. These are shown against the scale Exceptional – Good – Borderline – Weak and indicate the candidate's relative performance in each paper.

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TO THE TEACHER

Candidature

Each year BEC is taken by over 50,000 candidates throughout the world. Most candidates are either already in work or studying in preparation for the world of work.

Content, preparation and assessment

Material used throughout BEC is as far as possible authentic and free of bias, and reflects the international flavour of the examination. The subject matter should not advantage or disadvantage certain groups of candidates, nor should it offend in areas such as religion, politics or sex.

TEST OF READING

PART	MAIN SKILL FOCUS	Input: Text type, content	Response:	No. of Items /marks
1	Reading for gist and global meaning	Authentic business-related text – either a single text or 5 short, related texts (about 450 words in total)	Matching	8
2	Reading for structure and detail	Authentic business-related text (450–500 words) with sentence-length gaps	Matching	6
3	Understanding general points and specific details	Longer text based on authentic source material (500–600 words)	4-option multiple choice	6
4	Reading – vocabulary and structure	Single business-related text with primarily lexical gaps (approx. 250 words)	4-option multiple choice cloze	10
5	Reading – structure and discourse features	Single business-related text with structure and discourse gaps (approx. 250 words)	Rational deletion Open cloze	10
6	Reading – understanding sentence structure; error identification	Short text (150–200 words) Identification of additional unnecessary words in text	Proof reading	12

Reading Part One

This is a matching task. The text is approximately 450 words long, and is made up of five related short texts of authentic origin. Examples could be a set of related product descriptions, a set of advertisements (for instance, for different types of services), notices or messages, book or video reviews, short newspaper items on related topics.

Texts may be edited, but the source is authentic. They are identified as texts A–E.

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There are eight items, each of which is one sentence long, numbered 1–8. Each sentence is a statement which can be matched with only one of the texts. The candidate's task is to read the sentence and then scan the texts for the one to which the sentence applies. Candidates are tested on whether they can understand the language of the item and relate it to the meaning of the text, which is expressed in different language.

Preparation
- present students with sets of related short texts (e.g. job advertisements, hotels, etc.) from newspapers, magazines, brochures;
- longer texts may also be divided into sub-headed sections;
- students should be encouraged to identify facts or ideas within each text, describing how the texts are similar and what differences they contain;
- the register or style of the task sentences is likely to differ from that of the texts and students should be given practice in recognising the same information in different styles, e.g. by re-writing advertisements into objective prose;
- the task is designed to go beyond simple word-matching and students will need to practise paraphrasing;
- activities that help students to identify target information among otherwise superfluous text (e.g. choosing what to watch from TV listings) would be beneficial;
- above all, students should treat the task as an example of information-processing skills which are frequently employed in social and professional life.

Reading Part Two

This is a gapped text with six sentence-length gaps. The text is 450 to 500 words long, and comes from an authentic business-related source, although it may be edited. Sources include business articles from newspapers or magazines, books on topics such as management, or company literature such as annual reports. Candidates have to read the text and then identify the correct sentence to fill each gap from a set of eight sentences marked A–H. Sentence H is the example, and one other sentence is a distractor which does not fit any of the gaps. Understanding, not only of the meaning of the text but of some of the features of its structure, is tested.

Preparation
- this task requires an overt focus on cohesion and coherence to which many students may not be accustomed;
- it would be helpful for students to piece back together texts that have been cut up, discussing why texts fit together as they do;
- it would be useful for students also to discuss why sentences that do not fit together do not do so;
- students could benefit from altering the cohesion of texts to make sentences that do not fit together do so, and vice versa;
- since culture affects discourse, including the order of argument development, discussions exploring this would be beneficial;

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- the cut and paste functions of word-processing, where available, could be exploited for this task.

Reading Part Three

This task consists of a text accompanied by four-option multiple choice items. The stem of a multiple choice item may take the form of a question or an incomplete sentence. There are six items, which are placed after the text. The text is 500 to 600 words long. Sources of original texts may be the general and business press, company literature and books on topics such as management. Texts may be edited, but the source is authentic.

Preparation
- multiple choice questions are a familiar and long-standing type of test; here they are used to test opinion and inference rather than straightforward facts;
- correct answers are not designed to depend on simple word-matching, and students' ability to interpret paraphrasing should be developed;
- students should be encouraged to pursue their own interpretation of relevant parts of the text and then check their idea against the options offered, rather than reading all the options first;
- it could be useful for students to be given perhaps one of the wrong options only, and for them to try to write the correct answer and another wrong option.

Reading Part Four

This task is a modified cloze: in other words, a gapped text in which the gaps are carefully chosen. There are ten multiple choice items, most of which test vocabulary.

The text is approximately 250 words long, and is based on authentic source material of one of the text types listed above. The candidate's task is to choose the correct option, from the four available, to fill each gap.

Preparation
- it is important for students to appreciate that the correct answer in each case is correct in relation to the gap itself, rather than in relation to the other three options;
- it is worth emphasising that this task tests lexical and collocational knowledge, and that the best route to this knowledge is to read widely within the kinds of texts that the task employs;
- it is worth discussing what aspects of linguistic knowledge are tested (collocations, fixed phrases, register, etc.);
- it might be useful to give students gapped texts and have them produce alternative words which fit and which do not fit the gaps;
- any vocabulary-building activity is likely to be helpful in preparing for this task.

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Reading Part Five

This task is an open cloze: a gapped text in which the candidate has to supply the word to fill each gap. There are ten items. Gaps are formed by rational deletion, being chosen rather than being simply those which occur if (for example) every seventh word is deleted. The focus is on structure, and coherence/cohesion in the text. Items tested may include prepositions, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, conjunctions, etc.

The text is based on authentic material, and it is approximately 250 words long. A title is usually included.

Preparation
- the kinds of words which are gapped may well correspond to the kinds of errors students make and therefore discussion of photocopied examples of students' compositions could be helpful;
- students should be encouraged to circle the word or words in the text that dictate what the answer is, in order for them to see that such clues to the answer may be adjacent to the gap or several words distant;
- students should brainstorm various likely words which might fit a particular gap, and then discuss why the ones that do not fit do not do so;
- students could be given several possible answers for a gap and discuss why the correct answer is correct;
- this task tests grammatical and structural aspects of language and any practice in these areas should be beneficial.

Reading Part Six

This is an error-correction or proof-reading task based on a text of 150 to 200 words, with twelve items. Candidates identify additional or unnecessary words in a text.

This task can be related to the authentic task of checking a text for errors, and suitable text types are therefore letters, publicity materials, etc. The text is presented with twelve numbered lines, which are the lines containing the items. Further lines at the end may complete the text, but they are not numbered.

Preparation
- students should be reminded that this task represents a kind of editing that is common practice, even in their first language;
- any work on error analysis is likely to be helpful for this task;
- it may well be that photocopies of students' own writing could provide an authentic source for practice;
- a reverse of the exercise (giving students texts with missing words) might prove beneficial.

Marks

One mark is given for each correct answer. The total score is then weighted to 30 marks for the whole Reading paper.

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TEST OF WRITING

PART	Functions/Communicative Task	Input	Response:	Register
1	e.g. describing or comparing figures from graphic input, making inferences	Rubric and graphic input	Short report (medium may be memo or email) (120–140 words)	Neutral/ informal
2	**Report**: describing, summarising **Proposal**: describing, summarising, recommending, persuading **Correspondence**: e.g. explaining, apologising, reassuring, complaining	Rubric, possibly supplemented by brief input text, e.g. notice, advert,	**Candidates choose from** report (medium could be memo or email) or proposal (medium could be memo or email) or business correspondence (medium may be letter, fax or email) (200– 250 words)	Neutral/ formal

For BEC Higher, candidates are required to produce two pieces of Writing:
- a short report based on graphic input;
- one of the following (of the candidate's choosing):
  - a piece of business correspondence; this means correspondence with somebody outside the company (e.g. a customer or supplier) on a business-related matter, and the delivery medium may be a letter, fax or email;
  - a report; the report will contain an introduction, main body of findings and conclusion; it is possible that the report may be delivered through the medium of a memo or an email;
  - a proposal; this has a similar format to a report, but unlike the report, the focus of the proposal is on the future, with the main focus being on recommendations for discussion; it is possible that the proposal may be delivered through the medium of a memo or an email.

Writing Part One

This is a guided writing task, in which the candidate produces a brief (120–140 word) report. The task provides a realistic situation in which it is necessary to analyse some sort of graphic input and express the information it conveys in words. Graphs, bar charts and pie charts of the type frequently used in the business pages of newspapers, company reports and brochures may provide a starting point.The graphic input is taken from an authentic source, but may be modified in the same way that a text may be edited. The rubric acts to amplify and clarify the situation, as well as making clear what the task involves.

Writing Part Two

In most parts of the BEC Writing tests, all candidates are required to perform the same task because there is no danger of individuals or groups of candidates being disadvantaged by that task. The exception is BEC Higher Writing Part Two: in order to generate the range of language which is characteristic of this

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level of language learner, the task contains no input or minimal input, resulting in a relatively high background knowledge requirement from the candidate. In the absence of a choice of tasks this would be likely to disadvantage some candidates, so a choice of tasks is given.

Candidates choose from three options: a report, proposal or a piece of business correspondence. The task is supplied by the rubric, which provides an authentic reason for writing, and indicates who the piece of writing is being produced for. The input is therefore more detailed and specific than that of the traditional 'essay question' task type.

Preparing for the Writing questions

The first writing task involves the kind of graphic input of information which is common in the business world, and students should be exposed to a wide range of examples of graphs and charts from newspapers, magazines, company literature, etc. The interpretation involved is the translating of the graphic input into prose, rather than the recommending of action. Students should have practice in the clear and concise presentation of written information. Specific vocabulary and phrasing should also be developed.

The second writing task requires students to plan carefully in order to be able to produce successful answers. They should be given practice in considering:
- the target reader;
- the purpose of writing;
- the requirements of the format (letter, report, etc.);
- the main points to be addressed;
- the approximate number of words to be written for each point;
- suitable openings and closings;
- the level of formality required.

Exposure to, and discussion of, as wide a range as possible of relevant texts would be beneficial.

Assessment

An impression mark is awarded to each piece of writing using the general mark scheme. Examiners use band descriptors to assess language and task achievement. Each piece of writing is assigned to a band between 0 and 5 and can be awarded one of two performance levels within that Band. Acceptable performance at BEC Higher level is represented by a band 3.

The general impression mark scheme is used in conjunction with a task-specific mark scheme, which focuses on criteria specific to each particular task. This summarises the content, organisation, register, format and effect on target reader indicated in the task.

American spelling and usage is acceptable.

The Band scores awarded are translated to a mark out of 10 for Part 1 and a mark out of 20 for Part 2.

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Band	
5	Full realisation of the task set. ● All content points included. ● Controlled, natural use of language; minimal errors. ● Wide range of structure and vocabulary. ● Effectively organised, with appropriate use of cohesive devices. ● Register and format consistently appropriate. Very positive effect on the reader.
4	Good realisation of the task set. ● All major content points included; possibly minor omissions. ● Natural use of language; errors only when complex language is attempted. ● Good range of structure and vocabulary. ● Generally well-organised, with attention paid to cohesion. ● Register and format on the whole appropriate. Positive effect on the reader.
3	Reasonable achievement of the task set. ● All major content points included; possibly minor omissions. ● Reasonable control, although a more ambitious attempt at the task may lead to a number of non-impeding errors. ● Adequate range of structure and vocabulary. ● Organisation and cohesion is satisfactory. ● Register and format reasonable, although not entirely successful. Satisfactory effect on the reader.
2	Inadequate attempt at the task set. ● Some major content points omitted or inadequately dealt with; possibly some irrelevance. ● Errors sometimes obscure communication and are likely to be numerous. ● Limited range of structure and vocabulary; language is too elementary for this level. ● Content is not clearly organised. ● Unsuccessful attempt at appropriate register and format. Negative effect on the reader.
1	Poor attempt at the task set. ● Notable content omissions and / or considerable irrelevance. ● Serious lack of control; frequent basic errors. ● Narrow range of structure and vocabulary. ● Lack of organisation. ● Little attempt at appropriate register and format. Very negative effect on the reader.
0	Achieves nothing. Either fewer than 25% of the required number of words or totally illegible or totally irrelevant.

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TEST OF LISTENING

PART	MAIN SKILL FOCUS	Input	Item type	No. of Items
1	Listening for and noting specific information	Informational monologue	Gap filling requiring limited written responses (i.e. no more than 3 words)	12
2	Listening to identifying topic, context, function speaker's opinion etc	5 short monologues linked by theme or topic, from 5 different speakers	Multiple matching	10
3	Listening for gist, specific information, attitudes etc	Conversation/interview/ discussion between 2 or more people	3-option Multiple choice	8

Listening Part One

This is a sentence-completion, gap-filling or note-taking task. The candidate has to supply only the key words of the answer, which will not be more than three words per item.

The spoken text lasts about two to three minutes and is a monologue. The text is heard twice. It is informational, and focuses on a series of identifiable facts. Topics might involve instructions, changes in arrangements or instructions, the programme for an event or meeting of some kind or details of the organisation of an event. The setting for the task could be someone giving information over the telephone, or a speaker addressing a roomful of delegates at a conference or people on a training course.

Listening tasks may be based on recorded material taken from authentic sources or more usually on scripted material. There are twelve items, which are distributed evenly throughout the text, so that candidates have time to record their answers. Answers to items may be numbers or amounts of money, but these will not involve the candidate in any calculations. Items of information are tested in the same order in which the information occurs in the text.

Listening Part Two

This is a matching task based on five short extracts linked by theme or topic and spoken by five different speakers, in monologue form. The texts last a total of approximately three to four minutes.

There are two tasks for each of the five extracts. These tasks relate to the content and purpose of the extracts, and candidates are asked to do any combination of the following: identify speakers, interpret context, recognise the function of what is said, identify the topic, understand specific information, identify a speaker's opinion or feelings.

The series of extracts is heard twice, and candidates must attempt both tasks during this time. It is for the candidates to decide whether they choose to do the first task the first time they listen to the text, and the second task the second time, or whether to deal with the two tasks for each extract together. For each task, they have a list of eight options to choose from.