

Introduction

The background to the update of PET

The Preliminary English Test (PET) was originally introduced in response to a demand for an examination at a lower level than that of the First Certificate in English and one which would be at the Council of Europe Threshold level, as defined by van Ek and Trim.

As standard practice in Cambridge ESOL, examinations are periodically reviewed as part of the examination production process, to ensure that they remain fair, up-to-date and in line with customer expectations. The PET examination was last revised in 1994.

As part of the detailed and comprehensive review of the Preliminary English Test which began in 1999, stakeholders were canvassed for opinions on the examinations. Teachers, Students, Local Secretaries and Senior Team Leaders provided Cambridge ESOL with valuable feedback about all aspects of PET. Cambridge ESOL received very encouraging responses from stakeholders around the world, and as a consequence the changes included in the updated tests are minimal. The updated examination in the format in this test book begins in March 2004. All new materials have been extensively trialled and, as before, all materials that go into the live question papers have been pretested to ensure that they are suitable for the PET candidature and, in terms of difficulty, are at the appropriate level.

The following summarises the changes to the PET papers.

PET Reading/Writing

- Reading Part 1 (signs and notices) is three-option multiple-choice (instead of four-option) and samples a wider range of type of notice, to include short personal messages (such as emails and 'post-it' messages).
- In Writing Part 1, students are given the beginning and end of the sentence for their sentence transformation task. This focuses the task solely onto the correct identification of the target structure.
- Writing Part 2 is a guided writing task with a strong communicative purpose.
- In Writing Part 3 (extended writing), there will be a choice of task to reflect the types of writing that PET-level students are producing in the classroom.

PET Listening

- Parts 1 and 2 are now three-option multiple-choice (instead of four-option).

PET Speaking

- Part 1 is more Interlocutor-led, but still focuses on the same area of personal information.

The review process leading to the update of PET has been carefully considered and all new task types have been thoroughly trialled to ensure that the materials are relevant and fair to PET candidates.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction***The level of PET**

Cambridge ESOL has developed a series of examinations which equate to the Council of Europe Common European Framework language levels. Within the levels, the Preliminary English Test is at Cambridge Level Two. This corresponds to the Council of Europe Level B1. This is shown in the chart below.

CAMBRIDGE / ALTE LEVELS		COUNCIL OF EUROPE LEVELS
CPE	Level 5	C2 (Mastery)
CAE	Level 4	C1 (Effective proficiency)
FCE	Level 3	B2 Vantage
PET	Level 2	B1 Threshold
KET & Flyers	Level 1	A2 Waystage
<i>Movers</i> <i>Starters</i>		A1 (Break through)

In the chart, the Main Suite examinations are shown in capitals (KET, PET, FCE, CAE and CPE) and the Young Learner examinations in italics.

Cambridge ESOL is a member of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). The members are all providers of examinations in European languages, and one of their principal objectives is to establish a framework of levels of proficiency in order to promote the transnational recognition of certification.

Threshold

PET is based on the Council of Europe's Threshold document. This represents an intermediate level of language ability that should be attainable in about 375 hours according to Threshold.

The materials a Threshold user can deal with

The text types that can be handled by the learner at this level include street signs and public notices, product packaging, brochures, city guides and instructions on how to do things, as well as informal letters and newspaper and magazine texts, such as articles, features and weather forecasts. The kinds of listening texts the learner needs to understand are announcements made at railway stations and airports, traffic information given on the radio, public announcements made at sporting events or pop

concerts and instructions given by police or customs officials. At Threshold level, candidates need to be able not only to pick out facts, but also to understand opinions, attitudes, moods and wishes.

What a Threshold user can do

Learners at this level, if travelling as tourists, can get all the information needed from a tourist information centre, as long as it is of a straightforward, non-specialised nature. Similarly, if taking part in a guided tour, they can understand the main points of a commentary and ask questions in order to get more information, as long as no specialised technical language is needed. They can deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through a travel agent or when actually travelling. In the context of work they can state requirements within their own job area, and ask questions of a fact-finding nature. In a meeting, they can take part in a discussion which involves the exchange of factual information or receiving instructions, but they may have difficulty dealing with anything unpredictable or unfamiliar. Where telephone calls are concerned, predictability is also important at this level, and as long as only routine matters are involved, the learner can receive and pass on messages. They can write simple personal letters within a more or less standard format.

Preparing for PET

Since PET is designed to test candidates' ability to perform language tasks similar to those required for successful performance in real life situations, practice in using English in realistic situations is the best way to prepare for PET.

Reading

Preparation is best done by giving students a wide variety of reading materials, including simple articles, reports, reviews, descriptions and narratives, particularly the type of English that is used in everyday life – advertisements, instructions and signs.

Practice should include extensive reading of texts as well as intensive reading, to give practice in skimming and scanning skills in order to understand the general meaning of a text or to look for specific information. For this, simplified readers are useful, also English language magazines in class libraries. Students should be encouraged to read widely about anything that interests them.

Writing

Practice should be given in short, controlled writing tasks, where the writing is for a specific, realistic purpose, for example, replies to letters, advertisements or invitations, diary entries, filling in forms, writing messages, including phone messages, writing short notes and letters to friends. Keeping a diary in English and writing to penfriends are particularly useful forms of practice for students.

Letter-writing is a very important skill which requires regular practice. Letter-writing layout is not tested, but candidates are expected to recognise and use appropriate salutations and endings. Letters to a friend relating to past experiences, present activities and future plans are likely to provide helpful practice.

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It is just as important to attend to meaning as it is to attend to forms of language. In the exam, errors which do not hinder communication are not penalised as heavily as errors which cause a breakdown in communication.

Listening

Students should be encouraged to listen to as many different sources of English as they can, for example, films, television, radio and airport announcements; they may also be able to hear English spoken in hotels, shops, restaurants, at the British Council, by tourist guides, etc. Listening to native speakers or fairly fluent non-native speakers is the best practice they can get.

Teachers can also collect recordings of short talks and conversations as well as using published language-teaching cassettes and videos. When devising practice material, teachers should remember that candidates will not normally be required to recall particular words used, but rather to understand and remember the meaning of a listening passage.

Speaking

Students should practise eliciting and giving simple information about themselves, for example, their name and its spelling, where they live, what they do, their interests, likes and dislikes.

It would be very helpful for students to do this by spending time regularly talking to a friend in English about what they have been doing and about their plans, etc.

In class, simple role-plays can provide an opportunity for spontaneous speech, but it is important that students are able to recognise and relate to the roles and that they are given a specific, purposeful task.

Students should always be encouraged to give reasons to justify the opinions or views they put forward.

PET candidates

Information is collected about the PET candidates at each session of the examination when candidates complete a Candidate Information Sheet.

In 2002, there were approximately 100,000 candidates for PET throughout the world. The candidates for PET come from a wide range of backgrounds and take the examination for a number of different reasons. The candidate profile for PET in terms of age, educational background and employment/studies varies according to geographical regions. The design of questions in PET takes into account the potential diversity of age and linguistic/cultural background of candidates. The following points summarise the characteristics of the current PET candidature:

Nationality

PET is taken by candidates in more than 80 countries. The majority of these candidates enter for PET in European and South American countries. Many candidates take the examination in the UK, and significant numbers take the test in the Middle East and Far East.

Age and gender

The majority of candidates are in the 14–18 age group (52%). A further 22% are in the 19–25 age group; 14% of candidates are aged 13 and under and 12% are 26 and over. About 55% of candidates are female.

Employment

Most candidates (about 70%) are in full-time education.

Exam preparation

A large proportion of candidates (about 85%) undertake a preparatory course before taking the examination.

Reasons for taking PET

Candidates' reasons for wanting an English language qualification at PET level are shown below:

- to gain employment (33%)
- for further study (31%)
- out of personal interest (36%)

Further information

PET is held each year in March, May, June (twice), November and December in centres around the world.

Current information on dates and the administrative details of the examination are provided separately to centres. A copy can be obtained from your nearest Cambridge ESOL Examination Centre. A list of Cambridge ESOL Examination Centres is obtainable from Cambridge ESOL (address below) or from the website (address below). All PET entries must be made through an authorised Centre.

Further information can be obtained from:

The Cambridge ESOL Helpdesk
University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1223 553997 Fax: +44 1223 460278
Email: ESOLHelpdesk@UCLES.org.uk
Website www.CambridgeESOL.org

In some areas this information can also be obtained from the British Council.

PET content and marking

Candidates record their answers in pencil on a separate OMR (Optical Mark Reader) answer sheet for the Reading/Writing and Listening papers. The answer sheets are then scanned by computer. Writing Parts 1 and 2 and Listening Part 3 are double marked by a team of fully trained markers who are closely supervised at every stage. The assessment and marking of Writing Part 3 and the Speaking test are described in detail later in this section.

The OMR answer sheets are given out with Paper 1 (Reading and Writing) and no extra time is allowed for candidates to transfer answers from their question paper to the answer sheet.

For the Listening component, candidates should make a note of their answers on the question paper. They are then given extra time to transfer these answers to the OMR answer sheet at the end of the test.

Examples of the OMR answer sheets are given at the back of the Student's Book.

PET consists of three papers:

Paper 1	1 hour 30 mins	Reading	5 parts	25%
		Writing	3 parts	25%
Paper 2	35 mins including 6 mins transfer time	Listening	4 parts	25%
Paper 3	10–12 mins	Speaking	4 parts	25%

Paper 1 Reading and Writing (1 hour 30 minutes)

In the PET Reading and Writing Paper, five parts focus on reading and three parts focus on writing.

READING

Part	Text type	Focus	Task	Marks
1	Signs, notices, messages, emails and other very short texts found in common contexts in everyday life	Reading for main message and some detail	5 multiple-choice questions, each with 3 options	5
2	Brief descriptions of 5 people and a set of 8 factual texts with a common theme, e.g. extracts from holiday brochures, book reviews, film guides, descriptions of consumer goods	Reading for detailed understanding	Matching each of 5 descriptions of people and their needs to one of the 8 texts	5

PET content and marking

Part	Text type	Focus	Task	Marks
3	A factual text, e.g. a public notice, advice leaflet, consumer information, advert, excerpt from a brochure, etc.	Scanning for specific information	10 true/false questions	10
4	A text which conveys an attitude or opinion as well as factual information, e.g. a newspaper article, review, letter, etc.	Reading to understand writer's purpose and attitude or opinion Reading for global and detailed meaning	5 multiple-choice questions, each with 4 options	5
5	A factual or narrative text, e.g. a newspaper report or magazine article, with gaps	Reading for global and detailed meaning Identifying the appropriate lexical or structural item	10 multiple-choice cloze questions, each with 4 options	10

The type of text varies according to the different test focus of each part. Texts are authentic, but may have been edited to bring vocabulary and structure within the grasp of students at this level. Texts may contain occasional vocabulary items or structures unfamiliar to many candidates at this level, but they will be able to deduce the meaning from the context, and understanding of these words will not be necessary to complete the task.

Part 1

Candidates look at five notices, signs, messages, etc. each containing a short text. A multiple-choice question tests their understanding of each. Candidates should be able to deduce the purpose of the notice, and understand its meaning, but they do not need to understand every word.

Part 2

This tests detailed comprehension of factual material. Candidates read a short description of five people and their needs and have to match each person to one of eight short, factual texts which typically give information about places, products, services, entertainments, etc. Three of the texts will either not match at all, or will only partially fit.

Part 3

This tests a candidate's ability to scan a fairly lengthy text (about 400 words) to search for specific information in order to answer ten true/false questions. There will be

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redundant information in the text and candidates may meet vocabulary which is not familiar to them. However, they will not need to understand such vocabulary in order to answer the questions, and if they meet an unfamiliar word they should be encouraged to read on and concentrate on finding the information asked for.

Part 4

This text goes beyond the provision of factual information and expresses an attitude or opinion. Candidates are required to read the text very carefully to answer the multiple-choice questions which may test whether they have understood the writer's purpose in writing the text and the attitude expressed in the text, as well as whether they have understood the meaning of the text as a whole.

Part 5

Candidates read a short text containing ten numbered gaps. There is a multiple-choice question for each gap at the end of the passage. The text is usually an extract from a newspaper, magazine or story and the questions are designed to test vocabulary and grammatical points.

Candidates should be encouraged to read the whole text before answering the questions and be reminded that they will need to read the complete sentence before they can decide which option fits.

Marks

The 35 marks for this component are weighted to give a total of 25 marks, i.e. 25% of the marks available for the whole test.

WRITING

Part	Focus	Task	Marks
1	Sentence transformation	5 sentences to rewrite	5
2	Communicative writing	Continuous writing of 35–45 words	5
3	Letter-writing or story-writing	Continuous writing of about 100 words	15

Part 1

This is a grammar transformation task. Candidates are given a sentence and then asked to complete another version of it using a different structural pattern but so that it still has the same meaning. They are given the beginning and end of the sentence and they have to complete the middle part. There may be more than one correct answer in some cases. There are five questions plus a worked example, and all the sentences are theme-related.

Part 2

This is a short communicative piece of writing (35–45 words). Students need to transmit three pieces of information. The rubric or input text informs students what they need to communicate to the reader.

Part 3

In this part, candidates are required to write an informal letter or story of about 100 words.

Marks

There is a total of 25 marks in the writing component, which translates to 25% of the marks available for the whole test.

Assessment of Writing Part 2

The focus of Part 2 is on addressing the three content points. The General Mark scheme below is used in conjunction with a Task-specific Mark scheme (see Test keys).

Writing Part 2: General Mark scheme	
5	All content elements covered appropriately. Message clearly communicated to reader.
4	All content elements adequately dealt with. Message communicated successfully, on the whole.
3	All content elements attempted. Message requires some effort by the reader. OR One content element omitted but others clearly communicated.
2	Two content elements omitted, or unsuccessfully dealt with. Message only partly communicated to reader. OR Script may be slightly short (20–25 words).
1	Little relevant content and/or message requires excessive effort by the reader, or short (10–19 words).
0	Totally irrelevant or totally incomprehensible or too short (under 10 words).

Assessment of Writing Part 3

Candidates are expected to write a coherent letter or story in an appropriately informal style. Credit is given for reasonably correct grammar, spelling and punctuation and appropriate use of a range of vocabulary. Candidates are expected to show a clear ending to their letter. They will be penalised if they write too few words (less than 80). They will not be penalised if they write too much, but they are advised not to do so, as there is only a limited amount of writing space on the answer sheet.

PET content and marking

Candidates' continuous writing is assessed according to the criteria below. Note that there are different levels of performance within each Band which translate to a mark out of 15.

This Mark scheme is provided for each examiner, along with a set of sample scripts which are chosen to demonstrate the range of responses and different levels of competence achieved in this writing task. This therefore provides a common standard of assessment for all examiners to use. Standardisation takes place before marking commences and all examiners are monitored during the marking exercise to ensure consistent standards and reliability of marking.

Note: This Mark scheme is **interpreted at PET level**.

Writing Part 3: General Mark scheme	
Band 5	<p>Very good attempt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident and ambitious use of language • Wide range of structures and vocabulary within the task set • Well organised and coherent, through use of simple linking devices • Errors are minor, due to ambition and non-impeding <p>Requires no effort by the reader</p>
Band 4	<p>Good attempt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairly ambitious use of language • More than adequate range of structures and vocabulary within the task set • Evidence of organisation and some linking of sentences • Some errors, generally non-impeding <p>Requires only a little effort by the reader</p>
Band 3	<p>Adequate attempt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language is unambitious, or if ambitious, flawed • Adequate range of structures and vocabulary • Some attempt at organisation; linking of sentences not always maintained • A number of errors may be present, but are mostly non-impeding <p>Requires some effort by the reader</p>
Band 2	<p>Inadequate attempt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language is simplistic/limited/repetitive • Inadequate range of structures and vocabulary • Some incoherence; erratic punctuation • Numerous errors, which sometimes impede communication <p>Requires considerable effort by the reader</p>