

Cambridge IGCSE™ English as a Second Language – introduction to the assessment

The components of the Cambridge IGCSE™ English as a Second Language assessment are for speakers whose first language is not English. The assessment is mainly for students who are between 14 and 16 years old. It is recommended that students have completed approximately 130 guided learning hours before entering for the exams. However, the number of hours may vary depending on the previous experience of each student at the start of the course.

The expected level of language proficiency for students to cope well with the demands of the assessment is B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference.

There are four syllabuses: 0510, 0511, 0991 and 0993. The content of these syllabuses is identical. However, students who are entered for the 0510 and 0993 syllabuses (Speaking endorsement) are given a separate grade for their performance in the speaking component. Students who are entered for the 0511 and 0991 syllabuses (Count-in speaking) are given one grade for all three components: reading and writing, listening and speaking.

For syllabuses 0510 and 0511, grades A*– G are available with A* being the top grade and G being the lowest grade. For syllabuses 0991 and 0993 grades 9–1 are available with 9 being the top grade and 1 being the lowest.

Syllabuses 0510 and 0993 (Speaking endorsement)

Reading and Writing component:	Listening component:	Speaking component:
counts towards 70% of the final grade	counts towards 30% of the final grade	a separate grade is given

Syllabuses 0511 and 0991 (Count-in speaking)

Reading and Writing component:	Listening component:	Speaking component:
counts towards 50% of the final grade	counts towards 25% of the final grade	counts towards 25% of the final grade

Assessment overview

Disclaimer: The information in this section is based on the Cambridge International syllabus. You should always refer to the appropriate syllabus document for the year of examination to confirm the details and for more information. The syllabus document is available on the Cambridge International website at www.cambridgeinternational.org.

Reading and Writing paper*			
(2 hours)			
Exercises	Assessment objectives tested	Tasks	Number of marks available (60 marks)
Exercise 1	R1, R2, R3	Reading comprehension for specific detail	8 marks
Exercise 2	R1, R2, R3, R4	Multiple matching	9 marks
Exercise 3	R1, R2, R3	Note making	7 marks
Exercise 4	R1, R2, R3, R4	Multiple choice	6 marks
Exercise 5	W1, W2, W3, W4	Extended writing (informal email)	15 marks
Exercise 6	W1, W2, W3, W4	Discursive writing (formal/semi-formal article, report, essay or review)	15 marks

* Students are not allowed to use dictionaries.

Listening paper**			
(approximately 50 minutes, including the transfer time of 6 minutes)			
Exercises	Assessment objectives tested	Tasks	Number of marks available (40 marks)
Exercise 1 (Questions 1–8)	L1, L2, L3	Multiple choice with four visual options (includes monologues and dialogues)	8 marks
Exercise 2 (Questions 9–18)	L1, L2, L3, L4	Multiple choice, short extracts (includes dialogues and monologues)	10 marks
Exercise 3 (Questions 19–26)	L1, L2, L3	Multiple choice, sentence completion (a monologue)	8 marks
Exercise 4 (Questions 27–32)	L1, L2, L3, L4	Multiple matching (short monologues)	6 marks
Exercise 5 (Questions 33–40)	L1, L2, L3, L4	Multiple choice (interview)	8 marks

** Each part of the listening paper is played twice. At the end of the test, students are given 6 minutes to transfer their answers onto a separate answer sheet.

Speaking paper*** (approximately 10–15 minutes)				
Parts	Duration	Assessment objectives tested	What happens	Number of marks available (40 marks in total for all three assessed parts)
Introduction	1 minute	N/A	The examiner welcomes the student and explains the procedure.	Not assessed
Warm-up	1–2 minutes	N/A	The examiner asks the student a few questions about their life and interests to put them at ease. For example: <i>What do you enjoy doing in your free time?, What are your favourite hobbies, and why?, What are your plans for the weekend?, etc.</i> This part is not assessed.	Not assessed
Part 1 – Interview	2–3 minutes	S1, S2, S3, S4	The examiner asks the student three questions on the same topic (e.g. <i>future career</i>). The examiner may ask extra questions such as <i>Can you tell me more about ...?</i> to help the student develop their answers. The student can ask for clarification if necessary. This part is assessed.	Assessed
Part 2 – Short talk	3–4 minutes (including 1 minute for preparation)	S1, S2, S3, S4	The examiner gives the student a topic card with two ideas (e.g. <i>learning a new language, learning to cook</i>) and asks them to talk about, for example, the benefits and challenges of each idea. The student is given one minute to think about what they want to say. The student then delivers a short talk comparing and contrasting the two ideas on the topic card. At the end, the student should say which idea they would prefer and explain why. This part is assessed.	Assessed

Speaking paper***				
(approximately 10–15 minutes)				
Parts	Duration	Assessment objectives tested	What happens	Number of marks available (40 marks in total for all three assessed parts)
Part 3 – Discussion	3–4 minutes	S1, S2, S3, S4	The examiner asks the student questions (e.g. <i>Do you think learning online is easier than learning in the classroom?</i>) to further develop the topic used in part 2. The student discusses their ideas with the examiner. The examiner may ask further questions such as <i>Why do you think this is?</i> to encourage the student to develop their ideas and opinions. This part is assessed.	Assessed

*** The whole of the speaking test is recorded including the preparation part. The students are examined individually, **not** in pairs. The examiner and the student must speak in English throughout the whole test. Students are not allowed to write anything down or use dictionaries.

Assessment objectives

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In the Reading exercises, you will be tested on your ability to:

- 1 Understand a specific piece of information
- 2 Understand how different ideas are connected (e.g. preference, agreement)
- 3 Find pieces of information by using the right reading strategy (e.g. scanning)
- 4 Understand ideas that are implied

In the Writing exercises, you will be tested on your ability to:

- 1 Express facts and opinions clearly
- 2 Group and link ideas clearly and produce a well-organised text
- 3 Use a range of words, phrases and grammatical structures
- 4 Use register (e.g. semi-formal) and style (e.g. a persuasive review, an informative report) appropriate for the given situation

In the Listening exercises, you will be tested on your ability to:

- 1 Understand factual information (e.g. names, times, places)
- 2 Understand more complex ideas (e.g. speakers' opinions, preferences, decisions)
- 3 Understand how different ideas are connected (e.g. agreement and disagreement)
- 4 Understand what speakers imply

In the Speaking exercises, you will be tested on your ability to:

- 1 Express ideas and opinions on a given topic
- 2 Use a range of words, phrases and grammatical structures
- 3 Produce well-developed answers and maintain a conversation
- 4 Pronounce clearly and use intonation to enhance what is being said

Assessment criteria for Writing and Speaking

The following criteria are designed to help with marking written and oral work. We have simplified the marking criteria used by Cambridge Assessment International Education in the Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language assessment so that they are accessible for students to understand success criteria.

If you wish to see the official marking criteria for Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language, please visit the Cambridge Assessment International Education website:
www.cambridgeinternational.org.

Writing (Exercises 5 and 6)

Give a separate marks for content and language. The total number of marks available for each exercise is 15.

First, decide which band is the best fit for each category. If all, or most, of the criteria of the band are met, give the higher mark; if the answer only meets some of the criteria, give the lower mark. The content and language marks can be very different if necessary.

Marking the content:

- Award a maximum of 6 marks.
- Focus on task fulfilment, relevance and development of ideas and how long or short the answer is.
- If the answer is very short, only award 1–2 marks.
- If the answer contains some irrelevant material, only award 1–2 marks.
- If the answer has no relevance to the task, award 0 marks.

Marking the language:

- Award a maximum of 9 marks.
- Focus on the range of the grammatical structures and vocabulary used, the number and the type of errors that appear in the answer. Also focus on the organisation of ideas and how well they are linked together.
- Answers that contain partially irrelevant information, and receive 1–2 marks for content, can still be given up to 9 marks for language.
- Answers that have no relevance to the task, and receive 0 marks for content, should also be given 0 marks for language.

Content	
Description	Marks
The answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> addresses the task completely only includes content which is relevant to the task uses an appropriate format and register throughout shows an excellent understanding of purpose and audience is very well developed meets the word count requirement. 	5–6
The answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mainly addresses the task mainly includes content that is relevant to the task uses mainly appropriate format and register shows a good understanding of purpose and audience is mainly well developed meets the word count requirement. 	3–4
The answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> partially addresses the task includes some content that is not relevant to the task produces text with an inconsistent or inappropriate format and register shows a lack of understanding of purpose and audience shows minimal development is below the required word count. 	1–2
No creditable content	0

Language	
Description	Marks
The answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a broad range of both common and uncommon vocabulary uses a broad range of simple and complex structures uses language which is almost always accurate; any errors are in less common vocabulary or complex structures, and do not affect the reader's comprehension is organised effectively uses a broad range of linking words and devices. 	7–9
The answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of common vocabulary, with some examples of less common vocabulary uses a broad range of simple structures, and tries to use some complex structures uses language which is mainly accurate; errors are mostly in less common vocabulary or complex structures, and do not affect the reader's comprehension is reasonably well organised uses a range of a range of linking words and devices. 	4–6
The answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses only common vocabulary uses only simple structures uses language which is sometimes difficult to understand, due to errors in common vocabulary and simple structures shows only a basic attempt at organisation uses a small range of linking words and devices. 	1–3
No creditable content	0

Speaking

When using the marking criteria below, consider the student's responses to all tasks in the practice test except for the warm-up. Select a mark from 0–10 for each of grammar, vocabulary, development and pronunciation, then combine them to give a total mark out of 40.

Marks	Grammar	Vocabulary	Development	Pronunciation
9–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student uses a range of simple and complex structures. Student makes minimal errors in both simple and complex structures. The meaning is always clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student can talk about and express opinions on a range of facts and ideas. Student uses a wide range of vocabulary. Student can use some vocabulary with precision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student always responds relevantly and develops their ideas. Student needs no or very little support to maintain communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student's pronunciation is always clear. Student often uses intonation effectively to communicate the intended meaning.
7–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student uses a range of simple structures and attempts to use some complex structures. Student makes minimal errors in simple structures, but more frequent errors in complex structures. The meaning is always clear despite the errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student can talk about and express opinions on a range of facts and ideas. Student uses a reasonable range of vocabulary. Student uses vocabulary correctly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student responds relevantly and develops most of their ideas. Student needs occasional support to maintain communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student can be understood despite some pronunciation issues. Student sometimes uses intonation effectively to communicate the intended meaning.
5–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student uses a range of simple structures, but complex structures are rarely used. Student makes some errors in the structures used. The meaning may sometimes be ambiguous because of the errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student can talk about and express opinions on simple facts and ideas. Student uses a range of vocabulary. Student uses most vocabulary correctly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student responds relevantly and develops some of their ideas. Student needs frequent support to maintain communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student can mostly be understood, but some effort is needed because of pronunciation issues. Student rarely uses intonation effectively to communicate the intended meaning.

Marks	Grammar	Vocabulary	Development	Pronunciation
3–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student uses a very limited range of simple structures. • Student makes frequent errors. • The meaning is often ambiguous because of the errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student can only talk about and express opinions on basic facts. • Student uses a limited range of vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student provides some irrelevant responses and rarely develops their ideas. • Student has difficulty maintaining communication despite frequent support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student can rarely be understood, effort is needed because of pronunciation issues. • Student doesn't use intonation effectively to communicate the intended meaning.
1–2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student only uses isolated words or simple short phrases. • The meaning is ambiguous throughout. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student has difficulty talking about and expressing opinions on even the most basic facts. • Student only uses extremely limited and repetitive vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student only provides very short isolated responses. • Student cannot maintain communication despite frequent support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student has serious pronunciation issues, which lead to a breakdown in communication. • Student doesn't use any intonation patterns.
0	No answer given	No answer given	No answer given	No answer given

Disclaimer: Please note that these marking criteria have not been produced by Cambridge Assessment International Education. The descriptors are based on Cambridge International's descriptors but have been written by the authors of this resource. If you wish to see the official marking criteria for the writing and speaking components of Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language, please visit the Cambridge Assessment International Education website.

Marking students' work

Reading and Writing paper		
Exercises	Answers which gain marks:	Answers which may lose marks:
Exercise 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> short answers lifted from the original text alternative answers which have the same meaning as the answer in the text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poorly spelt answers where the meaning is not clear.
Exercise 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly written letters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more than one answer per question a letter written over the initial answer which makes it difficult to decipher.
Exercise 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ideas lifted from the text that are clearly different from one another answers which may be paraphrased ideas from the text but which retain the same meaning as the original ideas from the text ideas written under the correct heading on a separate line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ideas that are too similar in meaning (only 1 mark can be awarded for two similar ideas) correct answers written under the wrong heading paraphrased answers which change the meaning of the original idea from the text answers that are so badly misspelled that the meaning is not clear.
Exercise 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the answer is clearly indicated by a tick in one of the boxes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more than one box has been ticked for the same question.
Exercise 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the email contains answers to all of the bullet points from the question the information given in the email is well developed and relevant to the ideas from the bullet points the answer is written in the correct style and appropriate informal register the email is of the correct length which is stated in the question all the information in the email is clearly organised into paragraphs ideas and paragraphs are linked using appropriate linking words and phrases (e.g. conjunctions, relative pronouns, adverbial phrases) there is a range of vocabulary (e.g. phrasal verbs – <i>get on with</i>, <i>set off</i>; fixed phrases – <i>I was in two minds</i>) and grammatical structures (e.g. <i>I've never done anything like it</i>, <i>I shouldn't have gone there</i>) appropriate for an email the email contains minimal errors, which only appear in more complex language structures, but these errors do not make it difficult for the reader to understand the ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some of the points from the question are omitted the ideas in the email aren't relevant to the bullet points from the question answers to each bullet point are not well developed and very brief the email uses the wrong tone and inappropriate register, which would have a negative effect on the reader the email is very short the email lacks paragraphs and the information is not well organised, which makes it very difficult for the reader to understand the sentences are very short with no or very basic linking words the range of vocabulary and grammatical structures is very limited (e.g. mostly the present tense and very common vocabulary are used) the email contains a number of errors and this makes it difficult for the reader to understand the ideas (e.g. wrong tenses, wrong word forms, missing words, misspelling).