

***FCE and CAE –
exam specifications
from December 2008***

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UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE
ESOL Examinations

English for Speakers of Other Languages

FCE and CAE - exam specifications from December 2008

Over the last two years, Cambridge ESOL has carried out a thorough review of the FCE and CAE examinations, two of the world's best known and most widely recognised qualifications for learners of English. Cambridge ESOL's specialist exam development and research teams, working closely with external consultants and senior examiners, looked at possible improvements in every aspect of the exams, and carried out consultation with exam centres, teachers and learners around the world.

As a result of this review, a number of improvements to the exams will be introduced in December 2008. These will not affect the level of the exams or the reliability of the results.

Summary of changes

- The overall length of the FCE and CAE exams will be reduced by approximately one hour
- The tests will focus on a wider range of skills and functions
- Some components of the exams will include new and/or improved task types
- Some components will be more standardised in content, making them user-friendly for students preparing for the exams

What happens next?

- New exam specifications and sample exam materials will be available from December 2006
- Teacher training seminars will start from April 2007 onwards. Information will be available on the website (www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams)
- The changed FCE and CAE exams will be administered for the first time in December 2008

Benefits

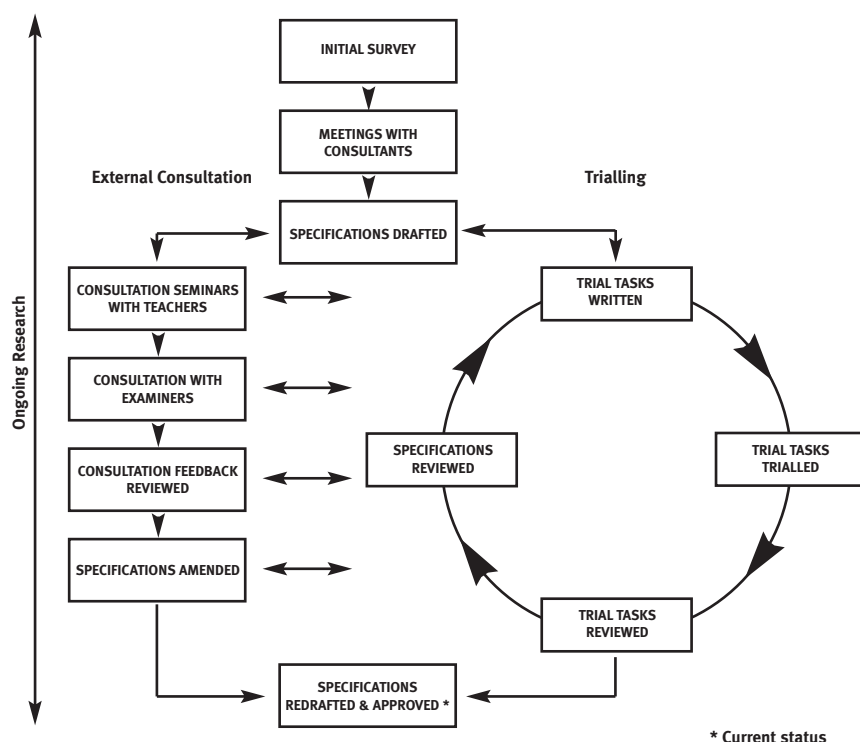
Benefits to test takers, teachers and stakeholders:

1. A shorter exam will be more appealing for test takers.
2. There will be a more straightforward progression from FCE to CPE as the exams will be structured more similarly, thus encouraging candidates to progress from one level to the next: from B2 to C1 to C2 in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
3. The updated structure of the exams will also help teachers who teach FCE, CAE and CPE.
4. Cambridge ESOL is looking into the presentation of results in order to assist candidates in understanding how they have performed. This will also help other users in the interpretation of results.
5. The changed exam formats will allow the use of new technologies in the future to speed up post-exam processes such as marking of exam papers. Enhancements such as these will ultimately bring benefits to test takers and test users, which may include faster turnaround of results.

Review process

The purpose of the FCE and CAE review was to ensure that the exams continue to meet the user's needs in terms of content and length. Among other issues, the review addressed the question of whether a reduction in the length of exams would make them more accessible to candidates; while of course maintaining the thoroughness of assessment.

The FCE and CAE review followed the standard review process as shown below:



Research activity

Using sophisticated research methodologies

Cambridge ESOL's enquiry into and analysis of various possible changes to the FCE and CAE exams have been led by an extensive programme using the latest research and validation techniques which provided an input for internal investigations and consultations (see above).

Validating and testing

The mapping of the exams to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) will ensure that the changes are properly validated and will provide a useful guideline for describing changes to test takers and test users.

How the exams will change

The tables on the following pages show the changes to all the papers in both FCE and CAE that will be introduced from the December 2008 examinations. There is also a summary of the changes in terms of exam timings, task types and test focus.

FCE: Specification from December 2008			
Paper	Timing/Length	Task Types and Format	Test Focus
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour • 30 questions • length of texts: about 550–700 words per text • about 2,000 words overall 	Part 1 - multiple choice Part 2 - gapped text task – sentences removed Part 3 - multiple matching	Part 1 - detail, opinion, gist, attitude, deducing meaning, text organisation features (exemplification, comparison, reference), tone, purpose, main idea Part 2 - text structure, cohesion and coherence Part 3 - specific information, detail, opinion and attitude
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour 20 minutes • 2 parts 	Part 1 - compulsory letter or email (120-150 words) Part 2 - Q2-4 choice of one task from the following: article, letter, report, essay, review, story Q.5 task based on set texts– task types from: article, essay, report, review, letter; two set books to be used, with a question on each text (120-180 words)	Part 1 - focus on expressing opinions, justifying, persuading, comparing, recommending, suggesting, advising, apologising, describing and explaining Part 2 - varying focuses according to task, including: expressing opinions, justifying, comparing, recommending, advising, describing and explaining
Use of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 minutes • 42 questions 	Part 1 - multiple choice cloze Part 2 - open cloze Part 3 - word formation Part 4 - key word transformations	Part 1 - lexical/lexico-grammatical Part 2 - grammatical/lexico-grammatical Part 3 - lexical/lexico-grammatical Part 4 - lexical and grammatical
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 minutes • 30 questions 	Part 1 - multiple choice – eight short unrelated extracts; monologues or exchanges between interacting speakers; one question per text Part 2 - sentence completion – a monologue or text with interacting speakers Part 3 - multiple matching – five short related monologues. One task, requiring selection from list of six options. Part 4 - multiple choice – a monologue or text involving interacting speakers. All texts will be heard twice.	Part 1 - general gist, detail, function, purpose, attitude, opinion, relationship, topic, place, situation, genre, agreement Part 2 - detail, specific information, stated opinion Part 3 - as for Part 1 Part 4 - opinion, attitude, gist, main idea, specific information
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 minutes • 4 parts 	Part 1 - conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate (spoken questions) Part 2 - individual one-minute 'long turn' for each candidate with a brief response from the second candidate (each candidate is given two photographs with a question) Part 3 - two-way conversation between the candidates (visual and written stimuli, with spoken instructions) Part 4 - discussion on topics related to Part 3 (spoken questions)	Part 1 - general interactional and social language Part 2 - organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions Part 3 - sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc. Part 4 - expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing
Total Time: 3 hours 59 minutes			

FCE: Summary of changes and rationale

Paper	Change	Rationale
Paper 1 Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three tasks (instead of four) • reduced to one hour by removing Part 1 • testing focus for the multiple choice is widened • gapped task will only be in sentence form (without paragraphs as an alternative) <p>From 1 hour 15 minutes, 35 questions To 1 hour, 30 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the new format is shorter, but has a broader test focus • item numbers will be fixed by part which simplifies the format • no alternative tasks will be available, which will make it more accessible for preparation
Paper 2 Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes the production of emails • reduction in word length for Part 1 • includes a review task type • includes a rationalisation of the set text question <p>From 1 hour 30 minutes To 1 hour 20 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing more briefly is a relevant real life skill, so the output required from Part 1 is reduced. The letter or email are compulsory because writing these is an important skill relevant to the candidature • the writing of email messages is added because they are used in modern life • a review task is added to Part 2 to increase the choices and broaden the candidates' experience • the set text questions will be related to a specific book • set books are reduced from five to two, as not all are well used
Paper 3 Use of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduced to 45 minutes by removing Part 4 (error correction) and amending lengths of the other parts <p>From 1 hour 15 minutes, 65 questions To 45 minutes, 42 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • four of the five current tasks remain the same • the grammar that the error correction task tests is tested elsewhere in the paper • the skill of error correction can be tested through the writing paper
Paper 4 Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • format to be standardised with other ESOL general English listening tests by having only one task available in each section • the length and test focus are not affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a single task type in each section will improve comparability between versions of the test and standardise the candidate experience. Candidates will know exactly which tasks to expect • the sentence completion task will be retained in Part 2 as this is more suitable to the level than note-taking • For Part 4, the multiple-choice task will be the only task retained; ensuring reliability between versions and over time
Paper 5 Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questions to be added to the visuals page in Parts 2 and 3 • no change to the overall timing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adding questions to the visuals page will help candidates to recall the tasks. This will standardise their responses and improve the comparability of the tasks • Part 4 is enhanced with additional prompts for the interlocutor

CAE: Specification from December 2008

Paper	Timing/Length	Task Types and Format	Test Focus
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour 15 minutes • 34 questions • length of texts: about 550–850 per part • about 3,000 words overall 	Part 1 - three themed texts with two multiple-choice questions on each text Part 2 - gapped text task – paragraphs removed Part 3 - multiple choice Part 4 - multiple matching	Part 1 - detail, opinion, tone, purpose, main idea, implication, attitude, text organisation features (exemplification, comparison, reference) Part 2 - text structure, cohesion and coherence Part 3 - as for Part 1 Part 4 - specific information, detail, opinion and attitude
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour 30 minutes • 2 parts 	Part 1 - compulsory task from: article, report, proposal, letter (180-220 words) Part 2 - Q.2-4 choice of one task from the following: article, letter, report, proposal, review, competition entry, contribution to a longer piece, essay, information sheet Q.5 task based on set texts – task types from: essay, review, article, report; two set books to be used, with a question on each text (220-260 words)	Part 1 – focus on evaluating, expressing opinions, hypothesising, persuading Part 2 – varying focuses according to task; including giving opinions, persuading, justifying, giving advice, comparing
Use of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour • 50 questions 	Part 1 - multiple-choice cloze Part 2 - open cloze Part 3 - word formation Part 4 - gapped sentences Part 5 - key word transformations	Part 1 - lexical/lexico-grammatical Part 2 - grammatical/lexico-grammatical Part 3 - lexical/lexico-grammatical Part 4 - lexical Part 5 - lexical and grammatical
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 minutes • 30 questions 	Part 1 - multiple choice – three short unrelated extracts; exchanges between interacting speakers; two questions per text Part 2 - sentence completion – a monologue (could be introduced by a presenter) Part 3 - multiple choice – a conversation between interacting speakers Part 4 - multiple matching – five short themed monologues. Two linked tasks, requiring selection from list of eight options. All texts will be heard twice.	Part 1 - feeling, attitude, opinion, purpose, function, agreement, course of action, general gist, detail, etc. Part 2 - specific information, stated opinion Part 3 - attitude and opinion Part 4 - gist, attitude, main points, interpreting context
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 minutes • 4 parts 	Part 1 - conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate (spoken questions) Part 2 - individual one-minute 'long turn' for each candidate with brief response from second candidate; each candidate is given three visual stimuli, with questions Part 3 - two-way conversation between the candidates (visual and written stimuli, with spoken instructions) Part 4 - discussion on topics related to Part 3 (spoken questions)	Part 1 - general interactional and social language Part 2 - organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions and speculating Part 3 - sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc. Part 4 - expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing
Total Time: 4 hours 40 minutes			

CAE: Summary of changes and rationale		
Paper	Change	Rationale
Paper 1 Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> removal of one matching task introduction of themed texts (similar to those in CPE Paper 1) use of wider range of text types <p>From 1 hour 15 minutes, approx. 45 questions To 1 hour 15 minutes, 34 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the range of text types, sources and task focuses in the paper is widened by the addition of themed texts in Part 1 currently there are two matching tasks with some similarities, so Part 1's matching task is replaced by the themed texts
Paper 2 Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reductions in Part 1 input and output addition of set text questions in Part 2 <p>From 2 hours To 1 hour 30 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing more briefly is a relevant real life skill, so the output required in Part 1 is reduced Part 1 input is reduced to a number of words that falls between FCE and CPE requirements to reduce processing required the nature of task output remains the same trailing and research into shorter input and output for Part 1 shows that candidates can be successfully assessed with this length of words reduction in input and output were found to be a positive development in research with examiners on the new tasks
Paper 3 Use of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduction to one hour by removing the register transfer, gapped text and error correction, and adding gapped sentences and key word transformations <p>From 1 hour 30 minutes, 80 questions To 1 hour, 50 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> these changes will result in a more streamlined paper, which will be more similar to other Cambridge ESOL general English exams key word transformations and gapped sentences are introduced: key word transformations appear in other levels and are efficient at testing grammar and vocabulary gapped sentences proved successful in CPE, testing vocabulary productively as register transfer and error correction can be tested through the Writing paper, both of these tasks are removed research into the CAE construct shows that the gapped text task has a similar test focus to the gapped text in Reading; its removal does not reduce the range of what is being tested
Paper 4 Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of a fixed format inclusion of short extracts (as in FCE and CPE) inclusion of only one productive task all texts to be heard twice <p>From 45 minutes, 30–40 questions To 40 minutes, 30 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a fixed format enhances standardisation between versions a standard format will appeal more to candidates short extracts will be introduced in Part 1; these work well in FCE and CPE as they test a wide range of focuses and introduce a range of texts, interaction patterns and topics the section which is once heard will be heard twice, following consultation and academic advice the matching task will be retained as it discriminates well and tests gist listening effectively
Paper 5 Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part 1 has two sections (instead of three) in which candidates are asked questions about themselves section 2 of the current Part 1, which invites candidates to 'ask each other something about...', is removed questions will be included on the visuals page to support the candidate (as in FCE) no change to the overall timing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> for Part 1, the new approach is more natural and will fit better with the other Speaking tests in the Cambridge ESOL general English exams as in FCE, Parts 2 and 3 will have questions provided on the visuals page to assist candidates in recalling the task Part 4 is enhanced with prompts for the interlocutor

We would welcome any comments about the exam specifications to: ESOLconsultation@CambridgeESOL.org

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