

# Cambridge English

The Cambridge English Scale explained

[www.cambridgeenglish.org](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org)

## Aligning Cambridge English exams to international standards

Cambridge English exams are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001)<sup>\*</sup> – the international standard in measuring language ability.

Our exams are known around the world for giving objective and reliable evidence of English language ability. Extensive research and validation ensures that each exam and each grade represent the same level of English, no matter where or when the exams are taken.

## What is the Cambridge English Scale?

The Cambridge English Scale is a range of scores used to report results for Cambridge English exams. It will be introduced from January 2015.

It is a refinement of our existing approach to score reporting and provides a clearer and more consistent way of describing candidate performance in Cambridge English exams.

The Cambridge English Scale covers a wide range of language proficiency and is aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Candidates receive a Cambridge English Scale score for each skill (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) and for Use of English. They also get an overall score for the exam – an average of the five individual scores.

Cambridge English Scale scores replace the standardised score and candidate profile used for exams taken before 2015.

The candidate's Statement of Results shows:

- an overall Cambridge English Scale score
- Cambridge English Scale scores for each skill (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) and Use of English
- a grade
- a CEFR level.

## What are the benefits of using the Cambridge English Scale?

The Cambridge English Scale provides clearer and more detailed information than was previously available, showing where the candidate's performance falls within each CEFR level and grade. This gives candidates and their teachers better information about their performance and helps them to identify areas for improvement.

The same scale is used across our exams, so it is also easier to understand the relationship between them. For the many candidates who take two or more of our exams in succession this will be particularly useful, as they will clearly be able to understand how their level of English is improving from one exam to the next.

The Cambridge English Scale gives more detailed information for organisations that use our exams, such as universities, employers, professional bodies and immigration authorities. This will help them to make decisions about individual candidates, particularly in cases where the organisation wants to focus on specific language skills.

Because the scores are reported on the same reference scale, it is possible for organisations to state a requirement for a particular overall score, plus minimum scores for Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Use of English.

## Which exams will the Cambridge English Scale be used for?

The Cambridge English Scale will be used for *Cambridge English: First*, *First for Schools*, *Advanced* and *Proficiency* from January 2015.

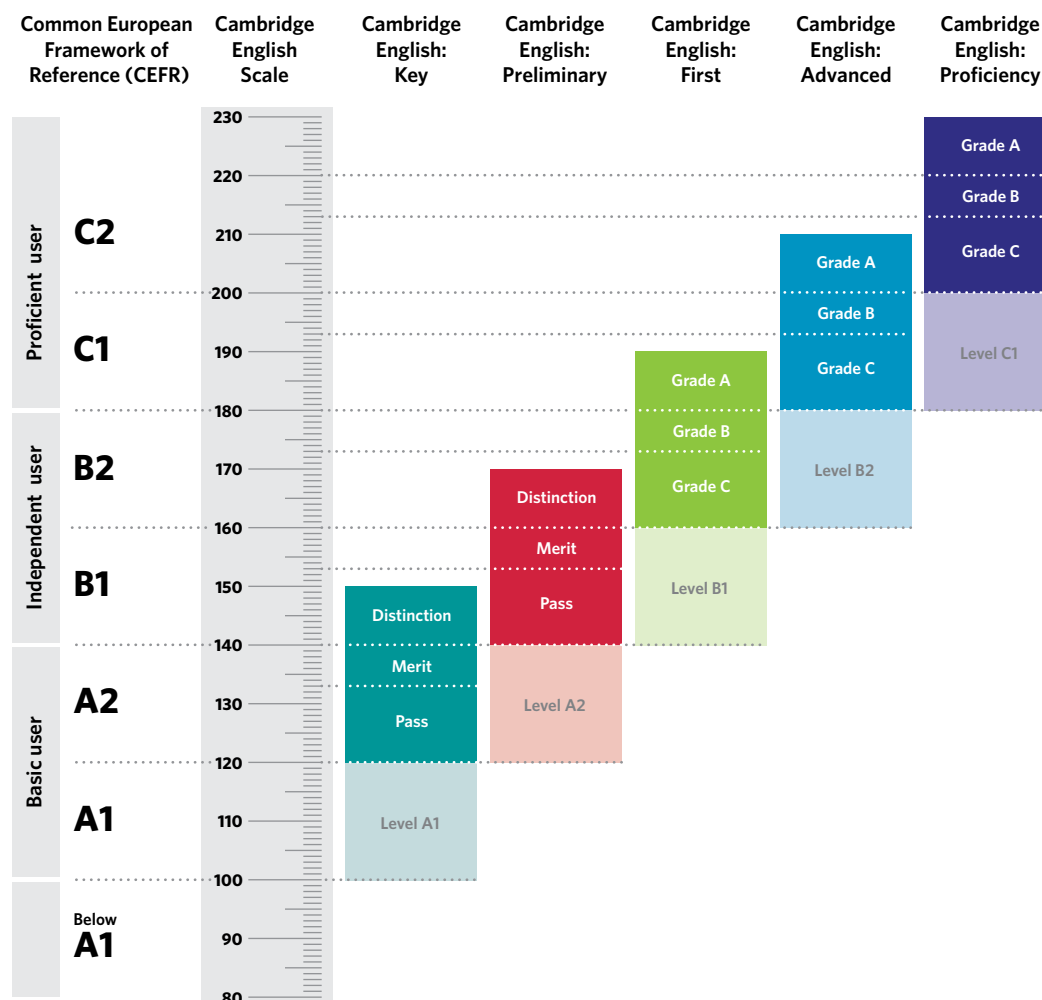
Results for *Cambridge English: Key*, *Key for Schools*, *Preliminary*, *Preliminary for Schools* and *Business Certificates* will be reported on the scale later in 2015.

*IELTS*<sup>\*\*</sup> is mapped to the Cambridge English Scale, but will continue to use the existing nine-band scale for reporting results.

<sup>\*</sup> Further information about the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) can be found on our website at: [www.cambridgeenglish.org/cefr](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/cefr)

<sup>\*\*</sup> *IELTS* is jointly owned by British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment.

The diagram below shows how *Cambridge English: Key, Preliminary, First, Advanced* and *Proficiency* are mapped to the Cambridge English Scale.



## How do the scores work?

The Cambridge English Scale is aligned to the CEFR, and each of our exams covers a particular section of the scale.

This means that a particular score on the Cambridge English Scale represents the same level of language proficiency, no matter which exam is taken.

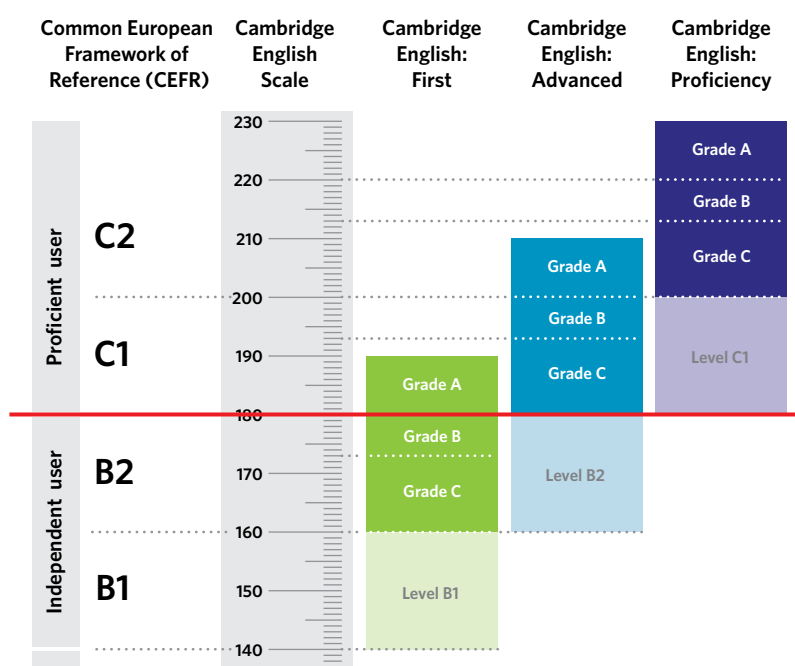
For example, scores between 180 and 199 cover CEFR Level C1. Candidates at the lowest end of C1 would receive a score of 180. They would achieve this score whether they took *Cambridge English: First, Advanced* or *Proficiency*. This is illustrated in the diagram on the following page.

## Where will the score be used?

The overall score and the scores for each language skill (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking) and Use of English will be shown on the candidate's Statement of Results and on their certificate.

These scores will also appear on the online Results Verification Service.

You can see an example of the new Statement of Results for *Cambridge English: Advanced* on page 7 of this document.



## How was the Cambridge English Scale produced?

There is a well-established link between Cambridge English exams and the CEFR, and the current score-reporting system reflects this. Results on the Cambridge English Scale are reached by applying the same underlying methodology, but the link between our exams and the CEFR is refined. This brings a greater clarity and transparency to score meanings and facilitates easy comparisons between different exams.

The scale was developed according to the well-documented and researched links between performance on different tests (using data from millions of candidates) and the processes by which we define and maintain standards.

These processes vary slightly for the different components and are described below.

### Writing and Speaking components

Writing and Speaking components are marked by trained, standardised examiners according to a set of analytic scales, covering a range of assessment criteria.

The assessment criteria are linked to the CEFR and form an overlapping 'ladder'.

The criteria for each level are the same across all our exams. For example, the criteria required to meet CEFR Level B2 are identical for both *Cambridge English: First* and *Cambridge English: Advanced*.

	First	Advanced	Example assessment criteria
<b>C2</b>			Uses the conventions of the communicative task with sufficient flexibility to communicate complex ideas in an effective way, holding the target reader's attention with ease, fulfilling all communicative purposes
<b>C1</b>			Uses the conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas as appropriate
<b>B2</b>			Uses the conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas
<b>B1</b>			Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas

Marks are awarded according to the assessment criteria, and are combined to provide the total mark for the component. Because both the assessment criteria and the Cambridge English Scale are linked to the CEFR, the Cambridge English Scale score for the component can be determined from this total mark.

This process ensures that candidates who demonstrate the same level of ability (no matter which exam is taken) are awarded the same Cambridge English Scale score.

For example:

Two candidates at low CEFR Level B2 sit our exams – one sits *Cambridge English: First*, the other *Cambridge English: Advanced*. They both just meet the criteria for Level B2 in the Writing paper and are awarded marks for the component accordingly. Although the raw marks across the two tests are different, the candidates are both awarded a scale score of 160 for the Writing component, as they have demonstrated the same level of ability.

## Reading, Listening and Use of English components

Reading, Listening and Use of English components contain a series of items which are marked as either correct or incorrect.

Cambridge English uses Rasch (1960/1980) analysis to ensure a consistent standard is applied in the grading of objectively marked components, accounting for differences in difficulty between them. This is achieved by calibrating the difficulty of all the items in a given test onto the same scale. This calibration allows us to determine the raw marks for each specific test paper that represent a predetermined level of ability – the standard needed to achieve a particular grade or level. Furthermore, the scales used for each test are linked to adjacent levels, meaning that these standards can be compared and linked across levels.

By a process of standards setting, these defined ability levels are linked to CEFR thresholds, meaning that the same process of mapping can take place as with the Writing and Speaking components.

## Linking tests to each other and to the CEFR

The relationship between Cambridge English exams and the CEFR is long standing and well documented. The relationship can be classified in terms of the historical perspective, the conceptual perspective and the empirical perspective. Discussions of all three perspectives, plus full references and links to key papers can be found on the Cambridge English website at [www.cambridgeenglish.org/research-and-validation/fitness-for-purpose](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/research-and-validation/fitness-for-purpose)

However, test alignment is not a one-off project – validation is an ongoing process which requires regular re-evaluation and confirmation that existing alignments continue to hold. To this end, and with the introduction of the Cambridge English Scale in mind, a series of alignment studies are in process to evaluate and validate the links between adjacent exams (for example between *Cambridge English: First* and *Advanced*) involving candidates taking both exams. This will ensure the integrity of the scale across the suite of exams, and mean that we can be sure that a score of 175 on *Cambridge English: First* corresponds to the same level of performance as a score of 175 on *Cambridge English: Advanced*.

The alignment of *IELTS* to the CEFR and to the Cambridge English Scale has been similarly established by means of empirical investigation. In 2009, we undertook a comparison study to benchmark C1 level as represented by *Cambridge English: Advanced* against *IELTS* scores. For this exercise an empirical validation study was undertaken where registered *IELTS* candidates were invited to also take *Cambridge English: Advanced*, and registered *Cambridge English: Advanced* candidates were invited to take *IELTS*. This counterbalanced design accounted for preparation or motivation-related effects on one test or the other. The candidates' performances on the two exams were then compared using what is known as the equipercentile method to arrive at the score relationship on the two exams. See UCLES (2013a) for a fuller description of the *Cambridge English: Advanced/IELTS* comparison study. We are currently undertaking a similar comparison study for *Cambridge English: First* and *IELTS*.

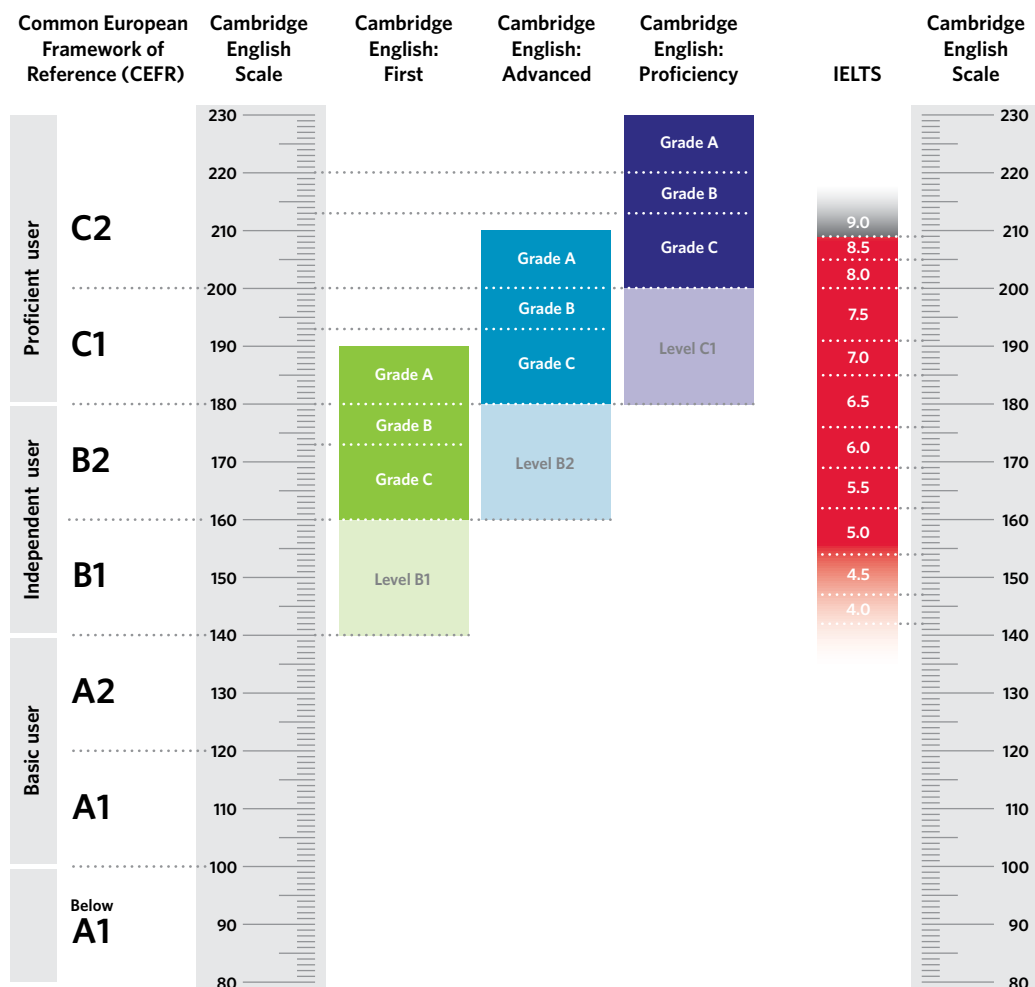
## Further information

See the *Cambridge English: First, Advanced and Proficiency Handbooks for teachers* (UCLES 2012, 2014a, 2014b) for the public versions of the Writing and Speaking assessment scales. See Lim (2012), Galaczi and French (2007) and Galaczi, French, Hubbard and Green (2011) for detailed accounts of the development and validation of the scales and their link to the CEFR, and Shaw and Weir (2007) and Taylor (Ed.) (2011) for comprehensive accounts of the Cambridge English Writing and Speaking tests and their relationships to the CEFR. See French, Bridges and Beresford-Knox (2012), Taylor (Ed.) (2011) and UCLES (2013b) for details of quality assurance with regard to the marking of Writing and Speaking components.

See Khalifa and Weir (2009) and Geranpayeh and Taylor (Eds) (2013) for comprehensive accounts of the Cambridge English Reading and Listening tests and their relationships to the CEFR.

## The Cambridge English Scale and IELTS

The diagram below shows how *IELTS* band scores map to the Cambridge English Scale.



The exact relationship between band scores and scores on the scale is seen clearly in the table below.

IELTS band score	Cambridge English Scale scores
9.0	209+
8.5	205-208
8.0	200-204
7.5	191-199
7.0	185-190
6.5	176-184
6.0	169-175
5.5	162-168
5.0	154-161
4.5	147-153
4.0	142-146

## Does the same score on two different exams represent the same standard of achievement?

The same score on two different exams represents the same standard of achievement. However, it is important to note that a higher-level exam covers a broader construct (the range of cognitive processes and functions covered by the exam). This means that the candidate for the higher-level exam has demonstrated the same level of performance on the broader construct, meaning that we can be more confident in the candidate's ability to perform those higher-level cognitive processes and functions.


This can be important in contexts where particular functions are needed, for example studying within higher education, and in such contexts both the score and the exam on which the score was achieved should be considered.

## Sample Statement of Results

See right for an example Statement of Results for *Cambridge English: Advanced* for exams taken from 2015. The Statement of Results shows a candidate's:

- overall Cambridge English Scale score
- Cambridge English Scale scores for each skill (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) and Use of English
- grade
- CEFR level.

The Statement of Results can be securely verified by recognising organisations at [www.cambridgeenglish.org/verifiers](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/verifiers)



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

Reference No.  
**15BGB9615003**  
To be quoted on all  
Correspondence

### Certificate in Advanced English

**Statement of Results**

Candidate name  
**An Example**

Place of entry  
**Cambridge**

Session  
**November (CAE1) 2015**

Result	Overall Score	CEFR Level
Pass at Grade B	195	C1

CEFR Level	Cambridge English Scale	Certificated Results	Reading	Use of English	Writing	Listening	Speaking
<b>C2</b>	210	Grade A					
	200	Grade B	203				
<b>C1</b>	190	Grade C		186	195	194	196
	180						
<b>B2</b>	170	Level B2					
	160						
	150						

The Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) is an examination targeted at Level C1 in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference.

Candidates achieving Grade A (between 200 and 210 on the Cambridge English Scale) receive the Certificate in Advanced English stating that they have demonstrated ability at Level C2. Candidates achieving Grade B or Grade C (between 180 and 199 on the Cambridge English Scale) receive the Certificate in Advanced English at Level C1.

Candidates whose performance is below Level C1, but falls within Level B2 (between 160 and 179 on the Cambridge English Scale), receive a Cambridge English certificate stating that they have demonstrated ability at Level B2.

Cambridge English examination results can be quickly and securely verified online at: [www.cambridgeenglish.org/verifiers](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/verifiers)

Results	Score
<b>Pass at Grade A</b>	200 – 210
<b>Pass at Grade B</b>	193 – 199
<b>Pass at Grade C</b>	180 – 192
<b>Level B2</b>	160 – 179

Candidates taking the Certificate in Advanced English scoring between 142 and 159 on the Cambridge English Scale do not receive a result, CEFR level or certificate.

Cambridge English Scale scores below 142 are not reported for the Certificate in Advanced English.

**Other**

**X** - the candidate was absent from part of the examination  
**Z** - the candidate was absent from all parts of the examination  
**Pending** - a result cannot be issued at present, but will follow in due course  
**Withheld** - the candidate should contact their centre for information  
**Exempt** - the candidate was not required to sit this part of the examination

**THIS IS NOT A CERTIFICATE**  
Cambridge English Language Assessment reserves the right to amend the information given before the issue of certificates to successful candidates.

## References

**Council of Europe** (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, available online at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf)

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