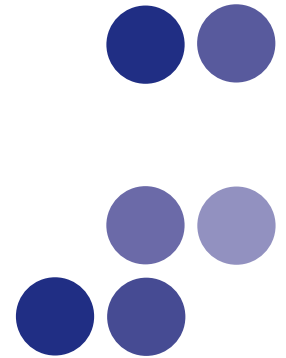




Cambridge English Proficiency

Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)
CEFR Level C2



Cambridge English: Proficiency Bulletin Four

The Writing Paper

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) conducts regular revisions of all examinations as a key part of the process of validation. Since its inception in 1913, *Cambridge English: Proficiency*, also known as *Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)*, has undergone a number of significant revisions and the 2013 revision represents the latest stage in the examination’s development.

Bulletins One (October 2010) and Two (April 2011) explained that the revised version of *Cambridge English: Proficiency* being introduced in 2013 will include changes which make it even more suitable for higher education study purposes and career advancement. Bulletin Three (October 2011) covered the changes to the current Reading and Use of English papers, which will be combined into a single paper. This bulletin addresses the changes to the Writing paper.

Following extensive trialling and feedback, as reported in Bulletin Two, the test specifications are now finalised.

Summary of the new *Cambridge English: Proficiency Writing paper*

Component name	Writing
Timing	1 hour 30 minutes
Format	Part 1: a compulsory essay task Part 2: one task from a choice of five, including 2 set text options
Length	Part 1: 240 – 280 words Part 2: 280 – 320 words
Task Types	article, essay, letter, report, review
Marks	Each task carries equal marks

Structure and Tasks

Part	Task type and focus	Format
1	an essay with a discursive focus	Candidates are required to write an essay summarising and evaluating the key ideas contained in two input texts of approximately 100 words each. These texts may contain complementary or contrasting opinions drawn from a variety of authentic, contemporary sources.

2	a contextualised task from a range of text types, including questions on set texts	Candidates have a choice of task in Questions 2 – 5. Each task provides candidates with a clear context, topic, reason for writing and target reader. Questions 5a and 5b offer a choice of two tasks based on the set texts. The output text types for Questions 2 – 4 are: article, letter, report, review; for Questions 5a and 5b there is also the additional text type of an essay. Part 2 will always offer a range of text types, but will not necessarily include all the text types on any one paper.
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Rationale for changes in the new paper

Part 1

The major change to the Writing paper is the inclusion of a new Part 1 task, which has incorporated and modified the Part 5 summary question from the current Use of English paper.

The ability to identify key points and summarise a text is considered integral to writing proficiency at C2 level. The Common European Framework of Reference (2001) descriptors state that candidates at this level should be able to ‘write clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style ... complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective, logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points ... summaries and reviews of professional or literary works’. Elsewhere in the CEFR, it adds that candidates should be able to ‘summarise information from different sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation of the overall result’. The compulsory Part 1 question requires candidates to read two short passages, each approximately 100 words in length, on a particular topic. Candidates are instructed to respond to the input material by writing an essay of 240-280 words, summarising and evaluating the key points from both texts and including their own ideas in their answer. The introduction of the new Part 1, requiring candidates to summarise and evaluate as a part of writing their own coherent response to the task, provides comprehensive construct coverage of C2 level writing skills.

The ability to produce a range of different text types is already assessed in Part 2; introducing a compulsory essay task in Part 1 enhances the academic focus of the Writing paper.

Indications from trialling of the new task have been positive. Trialling scripts have been marked using the new analytical markscheme aligned to CEFR level descriptors for writing proficiency. Evidence shows that candidates at C2 level are able to identify key points and develop these in conjunction with their own ideas in an essay with a discursive focus. Moreover, the word range of 240-280 words provided sufficient scope for C2 level candidates to respond well to the new Part 1 task. In fact, the strongest candidates consistently produced responses of more than 300 words. It should be noted that candidates are not penalised for exceeding the recommended word lengths (unless indirectly if additional text leads, for example, to irrelevance or incoherence).

Part 2

Part 2 of the paper remains largely unchanged. The paper no longer includes the option of writing a proposal, but has retained the report option (which involves functions similar to those in writing a proposal), as well as the options of an article, a letter, a review and, in the case of the two set text options, the additional option of an essay task. The retention of set texts addresses the provision of contemporary literature as a means of engaging with language at C2 level.

The number of words for a Part 2 answer has been adjusted to 280-320. After extensive trialling (with candidates from key markets across the globe), it was concluded that this word range guideline for Part 2 questions provided appropriate scope for C2 level candidates to respond to the whole Writing paper in the reduced allotted time. As with Part 1, candidates exceeding the suggested upper limit are not penalised under the aligned markscheme.

Timing

The timing of the paper has been reduced from 2 hours to 1 hour 30 minutes. Trialling of the revised paper indicated that within this time candidates at C2 level were well able to demonstrate the competence of their writing skills, and many candidates wrote more than the number of words stipulated in the rubrics.

Conclusion

The new Writing paper ensures a consistency of approach in maintaining comprehensive coverage of writing skills at C2 level, while simultaneously reducing the timing of the paper and length of the required output. Although the reading input for Part 1 has been increased, candidates are required to write fewer words. Furthermore, the shift in Part 1, which is designed to synthesise reading, summary and writing skills, provides the opportunity to prepare more effectively for university level study and professional career development.

Keeping you updated

The first live exam dates for the new *Cambridge English: Proficiency* are scheduled for March 2013, but you can still enter candidates for the current exam at any session date until December 2012.

Full specifications for the new *Cambridge English: Proficiency* examination, including sample papers, are available now on the Cambridge ESOL website.

Bulletin NO 5 is scheduled for May 2012 – we will be looking in more detail at the new Listening paper, so watch this space.

Contact details

If you have any comments or questions, email ESOLconsultation@cambridgeesol.org