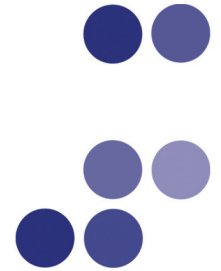




# Cambridge English Proficiency

Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)  
CEFR Level C2



*Proof of exceptional English ability*

Revision Bulletin No 3, October 2011

## The Reading and Use of English Paper

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations 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. 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 alterations which make it even more suitable for higher education study purposes and career advancement. This has led to very significant changes to the current Reading and Use of English papers, which are now combined into a single paper. Although the new combined paper will be shorter in length than the current papers, there has been no significant shift in approach or in testing focuses covered – the revised paper will retain its general English non-specialist focus, texts will be drawn from the same range of sources as before, and the same range of both language systems knowledge and reading skills are included.

Following extensive trialling and feedback, as reported in Bulletin Two, the test specifications have undergone refinement regarding content, timing and sequencing of tasks, and these are now finalised. In this bulletin we will explain the changes introduced into the new Reading and Use of English paper.

### Summary of the new paper

<b>Component name</b>	Reading and Use of English
<b>Format</b>	For Parts 1 to 4, the test contains texts with accompanying grammar and vocabulary tasks, and discrete items with a grammar and vocabulary focus. For Parts 5 to 7, the test contains texts and accompanying reading comprehension tasks.
<b>Word count</b>	2,900 – 3,400
<b>Timing</b>	1 hour 30 minutes
<b>No. of parts</b>	7
<b>No. of questions</b>	53

<b>Task types</b>	Multiple-choice cloze, open cloze, word formation, key word transformation, multiple matching, gapped text, multiple choice
<b>Marks</b>	For Parts 1-3, each correct answer receives 1 mark; for Part 4, each correct answer receives up to 2 marks; for Parts 5-6, each correct answer receives 2 marks; for Part 7, each correct answer receives 1 mark. There are a total of 72 marks available for the test.

### Structure and tasks

Part	Task type	Focus	Format	No. of questions
1	Multiple-choice cloze	The main focus is on vocabulary, e.g. idioms, collocations, fixed phrases, complementation, phrasal verbs, semantic precision.	A single text with eight gaps. Candidates must choose one word or phrase from a set of four to fill each gap.	8
2	Open cloze	The main focus is on awareness and control of grammar with some focus on vocabulary.	A modified cloze test consisting of a text with eight gaps. Candidates think of the word which best fits each gap.	8
3	Word formation	The main focus is on vocabulary, in particular the use of affixation, internal changes and compounding in word formation.	A text containing eight gaps. Each gap corresponds to a word. The stems of the missing words are given beside the text and must be changed to form the missing word.	8
4	Key word transformations	The focus is on grammar, vocabulary and collocation.	Six discrete items with a lead-in sentence and a gapped response to complete in 3-8 words including a given 'key' word.	6
5	Multiple choice	Understanding of detail, opinion, attitude, tone, purpose, main idea, implication, text organisation features (exemplification, reference).	A text followed by 4-option multiple-choice questions.	6
6	Gapped text	Understanding of cohesion, coherence, text structure, global meaning.	A text from which paragraphs have been removed and placed in jumbled order after the text. Candidates must decide from where in the text the paragraphs have been removed.	7
7	Multiple matching	Understanding of detail, opinion, attitude, specific information.	A text, or several short texts, preceded by multiple-matching questions. Candidates must match a prompt to elements in the text.	10

## Rationale for changes in the new paper

### *i) Combining Reading and Use of English papers*

A number of possible combinations of papers were considered as part of the revision project. The decision to combine Reading and Use of English was taken as these two papers share a number of key features. With the single exception of the key word transformations (Part 4), which are sentence-based, all tasks in the new paper are text-based. The Use of English texts (Parts 1-3) are of course somewhat less complex than the Reading texts (Parts 5-7) and naturally much shorter. However, there are broad similarities between Use of English texts and Reading texts in terms of the manner in which candidates read and process. For example, candidates are advised first to read through the text quickly and to try to follow a line of argument – as with Reading tasks. Similarly, with Use of English texts candidates are frequently reading at phrase level, sentence level or beyond sentence level, as they do with Reading tasks.

### *ii) Sequencing of Parts 1-4 and 5-7 – timing and mark allocation*

Following extensive trialling, it was decided to put the Use of English tasks first. This provides the same ‘easing in’ effect that the present Reading paper has; i.e. texts go from short to long, and increase in complexity. Trialling strongly suggested that if the Reading tasks were to appear first, weaker candidates, in particular, might well spend longer on what are long and complex texts, leaving themselves insufficient time to fully do justice to their ability in the Use of English section.

As regards timing, it would seem practical for candidates to adopt a 50/50 approach to the two sections; however, it is not our intention to be prescriptive about this and candidates should address their own preferences, strengths and weaknesses in allocating time. It should be noted that the total number of marks for Parts 1-4 and for Parts 5-7 are identical, since two marks are given for each question in the key word transformations (Part 4), the multiple choice (Part 5) and the gapped text (Part 6) and one mark is given for all other questions. In other words, the fact that there are more Use of English questions does not imply that candidates should spend less time on the Reading parts.

### *iii) Inclusion of multiple matching task*

A multiple matching task appears for the first time at *Cambridge English: Proficiency* level. This means that tasks are standardised across *Cambridge English: First (FCE)*, *Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE)* and *Cambridge English: Proficiency*, giving candidates a sense of continuity and progression. However, the ratio of questions to text length is slightly different from *Cambridge English: First* and *Cambridge English: Advanced* levels in that there are fewer questions over longer texts thereby better facilitating the skimming/scanning focus of the task. This has two advantages: firstly, this type of reading is widely used in professional and academic settings; secondly, this provides a wider variety of and greater distinction between tasks within the paper and has allowed us to introduce a set of reading focuses which were not previously included in the paper. It is possible for informal ‘spoken’ texts, such as four people being interviewed, to be represented in matching tasks. This type of text, when used, will lead to greater variety of text style, thereby compensating for the removal of the current short multiple choice task from the new Reading paper.

### *iv) Removal of short multiple choice Reading task*

In an effort to slim down the exam as a whole, there was a need to avoid duplicating the task focus in each part. Although short and long multiple choice texts can be very different in terms of style, source and purpose, the focus in both is on testing detail, opinion, attitude, main idea, implication etc. Also, the format of both these tasks is the same (i.e. 4-option multiple choice). For these reasons it was decided to remove this task type from the new paper.

### *v) Removal of gapped sentence Use of English task*

The same argument applies here. Although there is a clear difference in task format, there are also some similarities, in terms of what is tested, with the multiple choice cloze (Part 1). Both tasks test the meaning of words as they occur individually, or as part of fixed phrases, idioms and collocations.

*vi) Summary task moved away from Use of English / removal of comprehension questions*

The current Part 5 is a challenging academic task that only appears in the *Cambridge English: Proficiency* paper, and because it is a hybrid task containing elements of reading, writing and vocabulary, it is difficult to place within the current five paper divide. Following trialling it was decided to transfer the summary task to the Writing paper. Questions 40-43 in the current paper can be interpreted as reading comprehension questions. Although they have a very different format, it can be seen that the kinds of focuses they typically test, such as detail, the force of particular lexis, comparison and exemplification are all adequately covered by the multiple choice reading task.

*vii) Standardisation of number of questions in Use of English text-based tasks*

The multiple choice cloze (Part 1), open cloze (Part 2), and word formation (Part 3) are standardised at 8 items and have a similar word length. This provides a good balance for the new paper. Part 1 is predominantly lexical in focus, Part 2 predominantly grammatical, Part 3 and Part 4 (key word transformations) are both lexical and grammatical.

## **Conclusion**

The new Reading and Use of English paper is more concise without sacrificing quality, difficulty or coverage. It is almost all text based and continues to assess candidates' abilities through the use of a range of different texts from a variety of sources, making it an even more suitable and comprehensive assessment tool for both higher education study and career advancement purposes.

## **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 4 is scheduled for February 2012 – we will be looking in more detail at the new Writing paper, so watch this space.

## **Contact details**

If you have any comments or questions, email [ESOLconsultation@cambridgeesol.org](mailto:ESOLconsultation@cambridgeesol.org)