



Pretesting

Practice with a Pretest

What are pretests?

Testing materials before they are used in exams allows us to make certain our exams are accurate and fair. As part of Cambridge ESOL's commitment to quality and fairness, we submit all the materials in our exams to a number of procedures to ensure they are accurate and reliable. One of these quality procedures is pretesting.

How can they help teachers and learners?

Pretests give learners a chance to practise taking a Cambridge ESOL exam using genuine questions under exam conditions.

After taking the Reading, Listening and Use of English papers, the pretesting candidates are given scores. Writing papers are marked by trained Cambridge ESOL examiners and candidates receive detailed feedback about how they performed in the writing test.

This helps learners to know which areas they need most practice in, and gives them experience and confidence in taking tests. For teachers, it helps highlight areas where their learners might need more help.

How do they help Cambridge ESOL?

Pretests are an essential part of the exam production process. Statistical data is obtained for each task, which allows us to construct our exams to a prescribed level of difficulty. This ensures, for example, that an FCE Reading paper produced for June 2008 is at the same level of difficulty as the same exam produced in December 2008.

When can pretests be taken?

Exams with fixed dates (such as PET, KET and FCE) usually have a pretest window of about three weeks. Exams which are 'on demand' (such as IELTS) usually have an open pretest date. **The Pretesting Calendar** gives the pretest dates available for this year as well as information about the length of the pretest.

It is best if students take pretests about six to eight weeks before their real test. This means that they are nearly ready for the

exam, and so are at the right level. It also means that teachers will get the scores back in time to focus on any particular language areas in need of practice.

What else should I know?

1. All test papers and DHL costs are paid by Cambridge ESOL.
2. Pretest papers are marked in Cambridge, and scores are returned to schools within three weeks. (Writing papers are sent to examiners for comments on individual candidates, so these scores and reports may take up to four weeks.)
3. Pretest administration simulates the real exam, so that students not only experience the kind of questions they will face in their live exam, but also complete the answer sheets in a 'test-like' environment. We ask your help in ensuring that as far as possible students take the pretests under exam conditions.
4. Students are asked to take a short anchor test (15-20 minutes) with each pretest administration to help us determine the difficulty of the pretest.
5. After the pretest, all materials must be sent back to Cambridge ESOL. Materials are strictly confidential and cannot be kept for classroom practice.
6. Numbers of pretests available are limited, particularly for writing, and while we will try to supply the number of papers you request we cannot guarantee this. To ensure the fairness of the sample, we also restrict the proportion of students for each pretest from each first language.
7. Please note that pretests are not available for YLE or for Speaking papers.

How can we become involved?

To take part in pretesting, your school must either be a Cambridge ESOL live examination centre or have candidates who are preparing for Cambridge ESOL exams. You can request pretests online at www.CambridgeESOL.org, telling us how many papers you want to administer for each exam, or you can contact us at pretesting@CambridgeESOL.org telling us which exams you're interested in to be put on a mailing list for invitations to take part in future pretest sessions.

By requesting pretests you agree to maintain the confidentiality of pretest materials by observing Cambridge ESOL's pretesting security policy.

Some recent comments from centres who have taken part in pretesting

"Our students really value the feedback received from Cambridge ESOL as it gives them the confidence while taking the FCE exam."

"This is an excellent service you provide for learners and is highly appreciated."

"Previous feedback has reinforced teachers' own assessment of candidates' strengths and weaknesses who then focus on improving those areas."

"The feedback on the writing papers for FCE & CAE (November sessions) was particularly useful."

"Easy and clear instructions made the administration organized and well done."

How can I find out more?

You can find more information about the purpose and practice of pretesting from the website at www.CambridgeESOL.org

Live centres and approved pretest institutions can request pretests online.

For more information on 'pretesting windows' as well as information about the length of pretests, see the Pretesting Calendar.

If you have any further questions about participation in Cambridge ESOL pretesting, please contact us:

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