



**Istituto  
Tecnico  
Economico**

## **What is the Cambridge First Certificate exam?**

### **About 3.5 hours length**

The Cambridge English First Certificate Exam (FCE) is a certificate organised by the University of Cambridge.

It is aimed at upper-intermediate English learners who wish to prove the everyday use of written and spoken English for work or study purposes. The certificate can be an excellent qualification to have, since it is widely recognised by thousands of universities and employers worldwide.

Obtaining FCE certificates can open the door to better education or employment opportunities, as well as increasing the chance of you being allowed to live and work in English-speaking countries.

The FCE consists of 5 papers:

- 1) Reading +
- 2) Use of English 1 hour 15 minutes, 7 parts/52 questions

**It shows you can deal confidently with different types of text, such as fiction, newspapers and magazines. It tests your use of English with tasks that show how well you can control your grammar and vocabulary.**

- 3) Writing - 1 hour 20 minutes, 2 parts

**It requires you to be able to produce two different pieces of writing, such as letters, reports, reviews and essays.**

- 4) Listening - about 40 minutes , 4 parts/30 questions

**It requires you to be able to follow and understand a range of spoken materials, such as news programmes, presentations and everyday conversations.**

- 5) Speaking - 14 minutes per pair of candidates, 4 parts

It tests your ability to communicate effectively in face to face situations. You will take the Speaking test with one or two other candidates.

Papers 1, 2, 3 and 4 are always taken on the same day. Paper 5 is taken on a specified day, either on, or close to, the main exam day.

*The five papers are each worth 20 per cent of your overall mark.*

➤ **Before you sit for your exam.**

The FCE is an important challenge of your English ability. To be able to pass the test, you have to be confident in all skills of English – reading, writing, listening, speaking, sentence formation, grammar, vocabulary and so on. Typically English learners will need to have been preparing for the test *full time for at least six weeks (120 hours)* before they are able to pass the exam.

Remember to take the test only once you are ready. If you take the exam before you are ready, you may fail and lose much of your confidence in your own ability. If this happens you may be discouraged from studying further.

On the other hand, having an exam date to look forward to can be an excellent motivator to study hard and make the most of your time. Some students study harder than ever and see a huge increase in their ability in the weeks leading up to an exam.

➤ **How to pass the Cambridge First Certificate exam.**

1) Read the Instructions first.

Make sure you know what to do – always start by reading the instructions first!

2) Don't feel discouraged.

If you are struggling to find an answer, move on to the next question, you can go back to the question later.

There is no need to do the questions in chronological order. Start with the questions that you find the easiest and leave the difficult ones till last.

3) Keep an Eye on the Clock.

Don't run out of time! If you have developed FCE exam strategies, you will know before you start how much time you have allocated to this part of the test. Stick to your timetable. Remember, each part of the FCE Reading Paper carry approximately the same amount of marks. If you do one of the other two parts quicker, you can go back and finish

the part you left uncompleted – *it is all about maximising your chances to pass your FCE exam!*

#### 4) Reading tip.

If you believe that you should be reading the text first and trying to understand it, followed by answering the questions, then you are wrong! You don't have much time for this. It is always better to read each question first and then look at the text. Scan read the text to find the answer you need. Usually the question order is similar to the text order. So the answer to question 1 will be, usually but not necessarily, close to the beginning of the text and the last question will be close to the end.

#### 5) Use of English tip.

Do a lot of practice papers. Each year similar questions appear. In this way, you can find your strengths and weaknesses.

When you fail a question, learn the meaning of the words or grammar points in that question. This will help you improve. Common errors are in the use of similar words like *but, yet, however* or *could, would, should*. Just keep a clear head. If you have done your preparation by doing a lot of practice papers, these questions are quite simple and can be done quickly. If you don't know an answer, leave it and come back later.

(from part 5 to part 7)

### Part 5 (Multiple choice)

<b>What's in Part 5?</b>	A text with some multiple-choice questions. For each question, there are four options and you have to choose A, B, C or D.
<b>What do I have to practise?</b>	Reading for detail, opinion, tone, purpose, main idea, implication, attitude.
<b>How many questions are there?</b>	6
<b>How many marks are there?</b>	2 marks for each correct answer.

### Part 6 (Gapped text)

**What's in Part 6?**

A single page of text with some numbered gaps which represent missing paragraphs. After the text there are some paragraphs which are not in the right order. You have to read the text and the paragraphs and decide which paragraph best fits each gap.

**What do I have to practise?**

How to understand the structure and development of a text.

**How many questions are there?**

6

**How many marks are there?**

2 marks for each correct answer.

### Part 7 (Multiple matching)

**What's in Part 7?**

A series of statements followed by a text divided into sections or several short texts. You have to match each statement to the section or text in which you can find the information.

**What do I have to practise?**

Reading for specific information, detail, opinion and attitude.

**How many questions are there?**

10

**How many marks are there?**

1 mark for each correct answer.

#### 6) Writing tip.

Get used to writing English by hand quickly. Typing on the computer is not enough as the exam is handwritten.

For part 1, you will need to write a letter or email. Therefore, learn the usual English expressions like “Dear \_\_\_”, “**Yours faithfully / sincerely**” (letter) and “**Best regards**” (email).

You can also learn standard English expressions usually found in emails and letters. Examples: “I am writing to inform you”; “I am writing to request”; “Please do not hesitate to contact me” and “I look forward to hearing from you”.

For part 2, you can choose to write about a set text. If you would like to write about the set text, choose just one book and read it a few times.

Do practice papers. Part 1 and Part 2 carry the same number of marks.

So remember to spend 40 minutes on each.

Start by reading the question first and then spend a minute thinking about a good answer. It can help if you write a short plan for your answer. This will mean you can write a well-structured answer and not miss anything you want to say.

Write about what you can explain, even if you have to give an opinion you don't agree with. Just show your writing ability, that's all! Always make sure you write enough to show your ability. Part 1 should be 120-150 words, and Part 2 120-180 words.

On the other hand, don't say unimportant-unnecessary things to increase your word count, this will definitely not help.

#### 7) Listening tip.

Listen to as many different English sources as you can find. TV, films and radio can help you get used to understanding naturally spoken English.

Remember you should be comfortable with different accents. Don't focus only on American or British English. Listen to a variety. Do past exam papers. You need to be comfortable reading questions quickly and listening to English recordings at the same time. It has proven useful to my students/candidates to write a few key words while they listen.

This can help you remember what you have just heard when you answer the questions.

It can be good to write a few key words while you listen. For example, *expensive car, accident, police station*. Avoid the biggest mistake students make!

★ Do not try to remember the meaning of a word you have heard because then you will miss the rest of the recording.

★ The second common error is trying to concentrate on reading the questions and as a result you are missing the recording again.

If you can't concentrate on both, just listen to the recording. You can look at the questions afterwards.

## 8) Speaking tip.

Even if you are confident with your English studies, you **must** remember to practise speaking! Speaking English with other English learners is a good idea.

If you know any native speakers or English teachers, try to chat with them in English.

Talking to yourself in English is very helpful. Talk about what you are doing and how you are feeling. For example “*I have to go to the bank. I love the weather today. I forgot to close the window.*” The most useful advice is to relax, in this way you will be able to speak clearly and calmly. You have to talk for a few minutes, so you should not finish too quickly. Don’t rush.

Talk about what you are confident saying. If you don’t know the words, you can describe it in a different way or even say something different.

Remember that the exam is to test your English, not to learn your real opinion.

Another common mistake is that because you will have another candidate with you in the speaking exam, sometimes you will be tempted to repeat what they say.

Do not do this. Show what YOU know.

- **So if you’re planning to take your FCE exam soon, don’t forget these 5 useful tips to help you succeed!**

### 1. Practice reading

The reading part of the exam can be stressful – especially when you come across lots of unfamiliar words or phrases. Thus, practise lots of English reading – and try to get the general meaning of something quickly. Start by reading short posts and articles online, and then try longer pieces. It’s important not to get too stuck on a single word that you don’t know – remember that the clock is always ticking!

### 2. Write by hand – not computer

While you might not think it makes a difference, writing by hand can sometimes require a little more thought! If you’re used to typing in English on a computer all the time, you should also try some hand-written exercises. This will also help you to build up speed, which will definitely come in handy during the exam!

### 3. Get listening

Listen to English wherever you can – online videos, TV, the radio... this will help you get used to the speed and variety of accents that you’ll encounter in the test. Don’t just focus on American or British sources – but use both to add diversity.

#### **4. Have a conversation**

Practise talking in English as much as possible – and speak to anyone who will listen, or even yourself! Record yourself and watch over videos to see how you performed, and describe your everyday activities in English as you do them.

#### **5. Do mock tests**

Lastly, do lots of past papers to give yourself familiarity with the format of the tests.

You'll get a good feel for the structure and layout of the paper.

Try and do a few under strict timed conditions, so you can see how you perform in the time you have!