



Specification

This document provides detailed information about the Skills for English tests to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It describes the structure of the assessments in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed.

This document is for teachers, lecturers and test-takers, and contains all the mandatory information you need to prepare for the test.

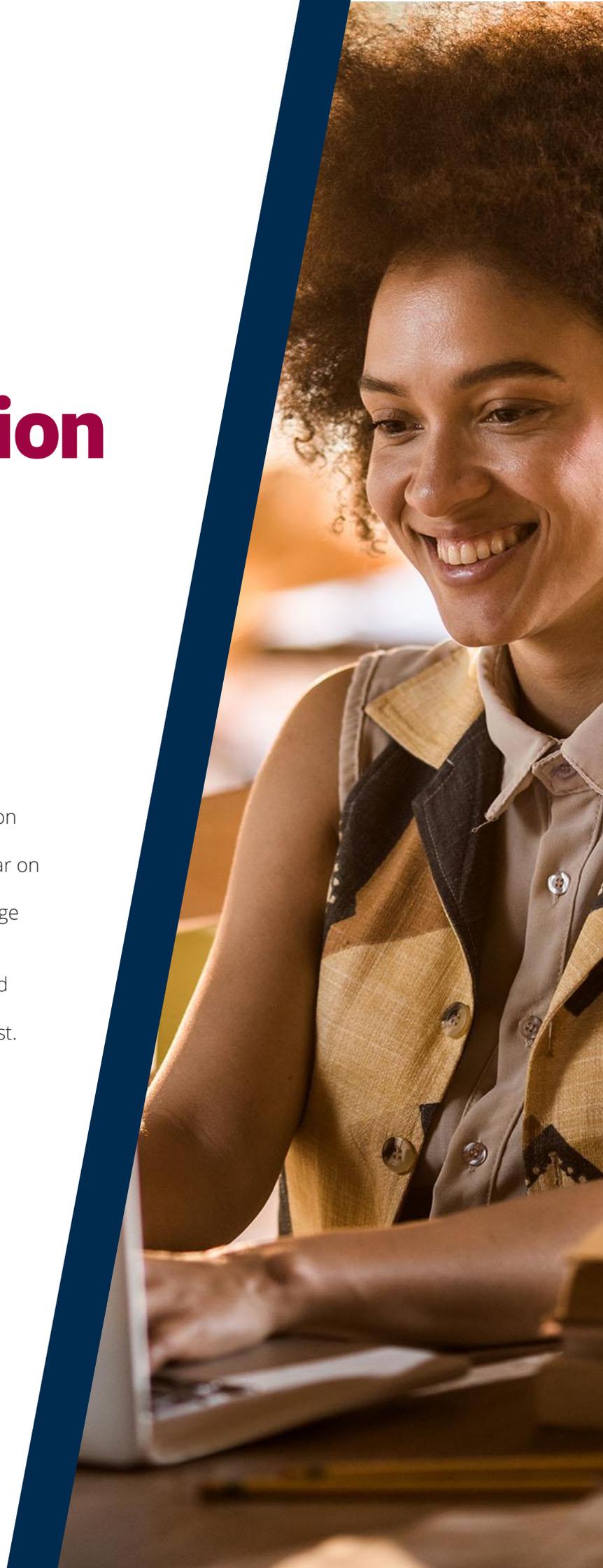
Version 4.0

Date

November 3, 2020

Information Classification

Client Confidential Data



Revision History

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	February 6, 2020	First Draft Approved.
2.0	March 23, 2020	Final Draft Approved. Supersedes V1.0.
3.0	October 13, 2020	Final Draft Approved. Supersedes V2.0.
4.0	November 3, 2020	Final Draft Approved. Supersedes V3.0.

Approval Section

Name	Position	Signature	Date

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications only on an non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, SQA must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from permissions@sqa.org.uk.

Contents

Introduction	4
Who is the test for?	4
Aim of the tests	5
Overview	6
Awarding	7
Skills for English Tests Assessment Content	8
Equality and inclusion	10
References	10
Results	11
How will test-takers be marked for each paper?	11
Skills for English A1	12
Assessment structure	12
Topics covered in A1 Speaking and Listening assessments	12
A1 Speaking	13
A1 Listening	16

Introduction

The Skills for English tests have been written for test-takers¹ who are speakers of other languages. They assess the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. They aim to provide a measure of English language proficiency through practical and authentic tasks which test-takers could expect to undertake in their everyday lives in an English-speaking environment. These include (but are not limited to):

- writing notes, emails and text messages
- reading and understanding a variety of written material such as newspaper articles, messages and other informational texts
- listening and responding to oral texts, such as public announcements, presentations and talks
- conversational skills in English

Skills for English tests are all computer based. This allows the tests to be delivered in multiple locations worldwide, in a variety of settings. Test-takers can book a test online and be able to sit the test within a matter of days. Certification of results is provided in as little as 14 days and in all cases within no more than 28 days.

Who is the test for?

The Skills for English tests are for test-takers aged 16 or over whose first language is not English. The tests do not require any previous work experience, specialised knowledge or vocabulary beyond what test-takers may need in their everyday social, academic or professional lives. However, test-takers must have already developed English language skills to the relevant Common European Framework of Reference levels (Council of Europe, 2001). Possible test-takers are those wishing to enter the UK for work or study, to access further or higher education or to establish themselves within an English-speaking community as a spouse or partner.

For test-takers planning to live, study and/or work in the UK, preparing for the Skills for English Tests will help develop skills that are essential for learning, life and work. Having an established level of English language helps to increase confidence, and successful test-takers should be able to effectively communicate ideas, opinions and feelings and respond to those of other people. This allows them the opportunity to participate more fully in life within an English-speaking environment. The Skills for English tests will assess test-takers on their personal, social and transactional English in a variety of authentic contexts.

Aim of the tests

The tests are written for test-takers who are required to provide evidence of their English language Proficiency. In the case of Skills for English (UKVI), this has been approved by the UK Home Office for the purposes of acquiring a visa in order to enter the UK.

At levels A1, A2 and B1 (2 components), test-takers will be able to demonstrate their ability to communicate verbally, to respond to questions about themselves and to show their understanding of spoken English. Skills assessed will include (but are not limited to) the following:

responding to questions about themselves and their everyday context engaging in transactional spoken activity such as giving an invitation listening to a series of short texts and answering questions on what they hear

At levels B1 (4 components), B2, C1 and C2, test-takers will be able to demonstrate their ability to deal with more challenging contexts across all four skills.

Skills assessed at these levels will include (but are not limited to) the following:

proficiency at relevant CEFR levels in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English understanding written and spoken texts in English in the contexts of everyday life producing written English in the contexts of everyday life applying knowledge and understanding of language in spoken and written English

Overview

The Skills for English tests are a suite of tests covering 6 levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2), which map to the descriptors outlined within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Mapping to the CEFR follows the procedures as recommended in the Council of Europe’s manual Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), available at: http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Manuel1_EN.asp.

The CEFR Companion Volume with new descriptors (Council of Europe, 2018) has been used as a complement to the CEFR in the writing of all items, to reflect the growing need for descriptors relating to mediation, reactions to literature, plurilingual/pluricultural competence and online interaction since the publication of the original policy document in 2001. The Companion Volume can be found at <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>

The table below outlines the format of the Skills for English Tests.

	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
A1	✓	✓		
A2	✓	✓		
B1	✓	✓		
B1	✓	✓	✓	✓
B2	✓	✓	✓	✓
C1	✓	✓	✓	✓
C2	✓	✓	✓	✓

At levels A1 and A2, test components cover Speaking and Listening skills only, as per the UK visa requirements for test-takers at these levels (basic user, Council of Europe, 2001). At A1 and A2 level, test-takers will be able to demonstrate their ability to communicate verbally, to respond to questions about themselves and to show their understanding of spoken English. Skills assessed will include the following:

responding to questions about themselves and their everyday context engaging in transactional spoken activity such as giving an invitation listening to a series of short texts and answering questions on what they hear

At B1 level, test-takers have a choice of taking only the Speaking and Listening skills components, or opting for all four skills components of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. This is to allow those test-takers who are entering at the lower end of the independent user level (Council of Europe, 2001) a greater breadth of choice, dependent on UK visa requirements. Tests at B2, C1 and C2 levels cover all four skills.

Awarding

Results are pass/fail only. Test-takers must pass every component at their given level in order to be certified.

Skills for English Tests Assessment Content

The Skills for English tests assess general English language skills across all levels of CEFR in the context of everyday life. Therefore, context and topics generally relate to life in the UK. Language used will be British English.

They are used to support test-takers' visa applications for entry to the UK.

CEFR Global Scales (taken from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>)

PROFICIENT USER	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
INDEPENDENT USER	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

	B1	Can understand the main points of clear, standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
BASIC USER	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently-used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (eg very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

****For further information about CEFR levels and what test-takers should be able to do in the four skills at each level, please see the following documents available from the Council of Europe website:***

Council of Europe, (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Council of Europe, (2018) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion Volume with new descriptors. Strasbourg: COE

Equality and inclusion

This assessment is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible to all test-takers. All necessary measures have been taken to avoid bias.

For guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled test-takers and/or those with additional support needs, please follow the link to the assessment arrangements web page: www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

References

Council of Europe, (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Council of Europe (2009) Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR): A Manual. Strasbourg: COE

Council of Europe, (2018) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion Volume with new descriptors. Strasbourg: COE

Results

Test-takers' overall results are determined by their performance across all components for a given level.

At all levels, the results test-takers will receive are:

Pass: test-takers will be able to use this result for their visa application.

Fail: test-takers will not be able to use this result for their visa application.

How will test-takers be marked for each paper?

Speaking

At A1 and A2 levels, test-takers will be marked according to the following criteria:

- relevance and appropriacy of response
- accuracy of response (grammar and vocabulary)
- clarity and pronunciation

Listening

Across all levels, marks will be awarded on the following basis:

- Part 1: 10 questions, 1 mark for each correct answer
- Part 2: 10 questions, 1 mark for each correct answer
- Part 3: 10 questions, 1 mark for each correct answer

Skills for English A1

Skills, knowledge and understanding being assessed

Assessment structure

Component	Marks	Duration
Component 1: Speaking	15	Approx. 10 minutes
Component 2: Listening	15	Approx. 20 minutes

Total number of marks: 30

Topics covered in A1 Speaking and Listening assessments

The following is an indication of topics which test-takers at this level may need to engage with in each of the components of the Skills for English Listening and Speaking tests.

- family
- likes and dislikes
- times, daily routines and weekend/leisure activities
- homes, rooms and where you live
- using 'can' and 'can't' to express ability and make requests
- making, accepting and refusing invitations
- making arrangements
- making suggestions and accepting or refusing them
- talking about current activities
- describing people
- explaining basic problems
- writing simple instructions
- talking about future plans with 'going to'
- weather

A1 Speaking

Format of Speaking assessment

There are 3 parts to the Speaking test, each providing the candidate with different opportunities for the Speaking performance. Only Parts 2 and 3 are assessed. Test-takers will engage with a recording and respond to recorded questions and tasks on screen.

A1 Speaking (approx. 10 mins)

	Focus
Part 1	<p>Introducing self</p> <p>Test-takers answer five questions about themselves. They are required to give the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> their name the spelling of their first name where they are from when they were born — their birthday what they do <p>Number of questions: 5</p> <p>Duration: 1–2 minutes</p>
Part 2	<p>Information exchange</p> <p>Test-takers are presented with two tasks, each exploring a given topic. Questions focus on personal context and everyday life. Test-takers respond to questions posed to them and record their responses to each question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task 1: personal context — five questions Task 2: everyday life — five questions <p>Duration: approx. 4 minutes</p>
Part 3	<p>Role play</p>

	<p>Test-takers are given a situation within which they present information in a series of related statements/utterances, in response to 5 prompts provided on the task card.</p> <p>Tasks have a clear purpose such as describing an event to a friend or communicating with a shop assistant. Test-takers can either limit their responses to the prompts provided on the task card or provide further information.</p> <p>Where information provided does not relate to the context of the role play, test-takers will not be able to score the full range of marks available on the 'Relevance and appropriacy of response' criterion (see Sample of Speaking Markscheme for A1).</p> <p>Duration: approx. 4 minutes</p>
<p>Relevant CEFR descriptions</p>	<p>Overall oral production: Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.</p> <p>Sustained monologue: describing experience: Can describe him/herself (name, age, family), what he/she does and where he/she lives. Can describe simple aspects of his/her everyday life in a series of simple sentences, using simple words and basic phrases, provided he/she can prepare in advance.</p> <p>Sustained monologue: giving information: Can give a simple description of an object or picture while showing it to others using basic words, phrases and formulaic expressions, provided he/she can prepare in advance.</p> <p>Overall spoken interaction: Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition at a slower rate of speech, rephrasing and repair. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.</p> <p>Understanding native speaker interlocutor: Can understand everyday expressions aimed at the satisfaction of simple needs of a concrete type, delivered directly to him/her in clear, slow and repeated speech by a sympathetic speaker. Can understand questions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions.</p> <p>Conversation: Can make an introduction and use basic greeting and leave-taking expressions. Can ask how people are and react to news. Can understand everyday expressions aimed at the satisfaction of simple needs of a concrete type, delivered directly to him/her in clear, slow and repeated speech by a sympathetic speaker. Can take part in a simple conversation of a</p>

basic factual nature on a predictable topic, e.g. his/her home country, family, school.

Goal-oriented co-operation: Can understand questions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions. Can ask people for things and give people things. Can act on basic instructions that involve times, locations, numbers etc.

Obtaining goods and services: Can ask people for things and give people things. Can handle numbers, quantities, cost and time. Can ask for food and drink using basic expressions.

Information exchange: Can understand questions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics. Can ask and answer questions about themselves and other people, where they live, people they know, things they have. Can indicate time by such phrases as 'next week', 'last Friday', 'in November', 'three o'clock'. Can express numbers, quantities and cost in a limited way. Can name the colour of clothes or other familiar objects and can ask the colour of such objects.

Interviewing and being interviewed: Can reply in an interview to simple direct questions spoken very slowly and clearly in direct non-idiomatic speech about personal details. Can state in simple language the nature of a problem to a health professional and answer simple questions such as 'Does that hurt?' even though he/she has to rely on gestures and body language to reinforce the message.

Informal discussion with friends: Can exchange likes and dislikes for sports, foods etc, using a limited repertoire of expressions, when addressed clearly slowly and directly.

Notes:

- 1) Statements above have been collated from the original framework as well as from the updated CEFR Companion Volume (2018).
- 2) Not every descriptor in the above table will necessarily be covered by all items.

A1 Listening

Format of Listening assessment

The Skills for English A1 Listening test has three parts. Test-takers will hear the recording twice.

A1 Listening (approx. 20 mins)

	Focus
Part 1	<p>Test-takers listen to five short recordings, which may be dialogue or monologue, and answer a single three-option multiple-choice question (MCQ) for each recording.</p> <p>Questions focus on one salient point. The recording is played twice.</p> <p>Number of questions: 5</p>
Part 2	<p>Test-takers listen to a conversation between two speakers (one male and one female) exchanging information and answer five three-option MCQs.</p> <p>Questions focus on key information which can come from one or both speakers. The recording is played twice.</p> <p>Number of questions: 5</p>
Part 3	<p>Test-takers listen to a monologue — e.g. someone leaving a message on the phone or an announcement — and complete five sentences by using drag-and-drop, drawing from a pool of available words.</p> <p>Questions focus on key information. The recording is played twice.</p> <p>Number of questions: 5</p>
Relevant CEFR descriptors	<p>Overall listening comprehension: Can follow speech that is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning. Can recognise concrete information on familiar topics encountered in everyday life, provided it is delivered in slow and clear speech.</p> <p>Understanding conversation between other speakers: Can understand some words and expressions when someone is talking about him/herself,</p>

family, school, hobbies, or surroundings, provided they are talking slowly and clearly. Can understand words and short sentences when listening to a simple conversation (e.g. between customer and salesperson), provided that people talk very slowly and very clearly.

Listening as member of live audience: Can understand in outline very simple information being explained in a predictable situation like a guided tour, provided that speech is very slow and clear and that there are long pauses from time to time.

Listening to announcements and instructions: Can understand instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short simple directions. Can understand when someone tells him/her slowly and clearly where something is, provided the object is in the immediate environment. Can understand figures, prices and times, given slowly and clearly in an announcement by loudspeaker, e.g. at railway station.

Listening to media and recordings: Can pick out concrete information (e.g. places and times) from short audio recordings on familiar everyday topics, provided they are delivered very slowly and clearly.

Watching TV, film and video: Can recognise familiar words and phrases and identify the topics in headline news summaries and many of the products in ads by exploiting visual information and general knowledge.

Identifying cues and inferring: Can deduce the meaning of an unknown word for a concrete action or object, provided the surrounding text is very simple and on a familiar everyday subject.

Note: Not every descriptor in the above table will necessarily be covered by all items.



[skillsforenglish.com](https://www.skillsforenglish.com)

 [@SkillsforEng](https://twitter.com/SkillsforEng)

 [Skills for English](https://www.linkedin.com/company/skills-for-english)

Assured by  SQA | Powered by  psi