



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.

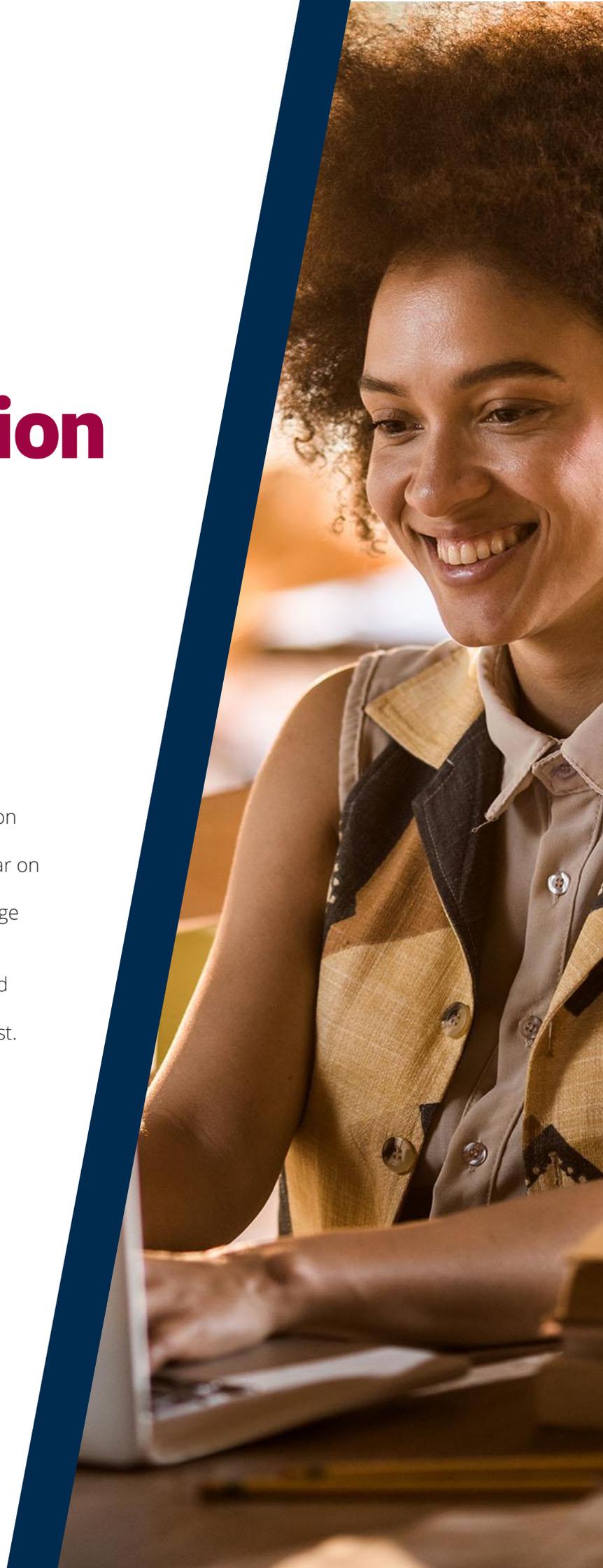
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2.0	March 23, 2020	Final Draft Approved. Supersedes V1.0.
3.0	October 13, 2020	Final Draft Approved. Supersedes V2.0.
4.0	November 3, 2020	Final Draft Approved. Supersedes V3.0.

Approval Section

Name	Position	Signature	Date

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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

At B1, B2, C1 and C2 levels, test-takers will be marked according to the following criteria:

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

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 A2

Skills, knowledge and understanding being assessed

Assessment structure

Component	Marks	Duration
Component 1: Speaking	15	Approx. 10 minutes
Component 2: Listening	15	Approx. 25 minutes

Total number of marks: 30

Topics covered at A2

Test-takers are expected to engage with topics listed at A1 as well as the following:

- current work and studies
- past and future work and studies
- general health, medication and labels
- accommodation
- local area
- socializing
- personal opinions
- free time and going out
- television and media
- holiday and festivals
- food and ingredients
- shopping, returns, ordering and complaining
- emergencies, lost and found
- enquiries and bookings
- travel, maps, timetables, directions

A2 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.

A2 Speaking (approx. 10 mins)

	Focus
Part 1	Introducing self Test-takers answer five questions about themselves. They are required to give the following information: their name the spelling of their first name where they are from when they were born — their birthday what they do Number of questions: 5 Duration: 1–2 minutes
Part 2	Information exchange 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. Task 1: personal context — five questions Task 2: everyday life — five questions Duration: 4 minutes
Part 3	Role play 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>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: 4 minutes</p>
<p>Relevant CEFR descriptions</p>	<p>Overall Oral Production</p> <p>Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines. likes/dislikes etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list</p> <p>Overall Spoken Interaction</p> <p>Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. Can manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort; can ask and answer questions and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations.</p> <p>Sustained Monologue: Describing experiences</p> <p>Can describe his/her family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms. Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points.</p> <p>Can describe everyday aspects of his/her environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience. Can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities. Can use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions. Can explain what he/she likes or dislikes about something.</p> <p>Sustained Monologue: Giving Information:</p> <p>Can give simple directions from place to place, using basic expressions such as 'turn right' and 'go straight' along with sequential connectors such as 'first,' 'then,' and 'next.'</p> <p>Sustained Monologue: Putting a case</p>

Can explain what she likes or dislikes about something, why he/she prefers one thing to another, making simple, direct comparisons.

Understanding an Interlocutor

Can understand enough to manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort.

Conversation

Can say what he/she likes and dislikes. Can make and respond to invitations, apologies.

Goal-oriented cooperation

Can communicate in simple and routine tasks using simple phrases to ask for and provide things, to get simple information and to discuss what to do next. Obtaining Goods and Services

Can ask for and provide everyday goods and services. Can get simple information about travel, use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask and give directions, and buy tickets. Can ask about things and make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks. Can give and receive information about quantities, numbers, prices etc. Can make simple purchases by stating what is wanted and asking the price. Can order a meal

Information Exchange

Can ask for and provide personal information. Can ask and answer simple questions about an event, e.g. ask where and when it took place, who was there and what it was like. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information. Can ask and answer questions about habits and routines. Can ask and answer questions about pastimes and past activities.

Interviewing and being interviewed

Can answer simple questions and respond to simple statements in an interview.

Notes:

- 1) Statements above have been collated from the original framework as well as from the CEFR Companion Volume (2018).
- 2) Skills, knowledge and understanding assessed at A2 include but are not limited to those assessed at A1 level.

A2 Listening

Format of Listening assessment

The Skills for English A2 Listening test has three parts. Test-takers will hear the recording twice.

A2 Listening (approx. 25 mins)

	Focus
Part 1	<p>Test-takers listen to five short recordings, which may be dialogue or monologue, and answer a single three-option 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 understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type, provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated. Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. basic personal and family information, shopping) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.</p> <p>Understanding conversation between other speakers: Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her that is conducted slowly and clearly. Can recognise when speakers agree and disagree in a</p>

conversation conducted slowly and clearly. Can follow in outline short, simple social exchanges, conducted very slowly and clearly.

Listening as member of live audience: Can follow the general outline of a demonstration or presentation on a familiar topic where the message is expressed slowly and clearly in simple language and there is visual support (e.g. handouts). Can follow a very simple well-structured presentation or demonstration provided that it is illustrated with slides, concrete examples or diagrams, it is delivered slowly and clearly with repetition and the topic is familiar. Can understand the outline of simple information given in a predictable situation such as on a guided tour.

Listening to announcements and instructions: Can understand and follow a series of instructions for familiar, everyday activities provided they are delivered slowly and clearly. Can understand straightforward announcements (e.g. telephone recording, radio announcements of cinema programme), provided the delivery is slow and clear. Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements. Can understand simple directions. Can understand basic instructions on times, dates and numbers and on routine tasks and assignments to be carried out.

Listening to media and recordings: Can understand the most important information contained in short radio commercials concerning goods and services of interest. Can understand in a radio interview what people say they do in their free time, what they particularly like doing and what they do not like doing, provided that they speak slowly and clearly. Can understand and extract the essential information from short recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters. Can extract important information from short radio broadcasts such as the weather, provided that people talk clearly. Can understand the important points of a story and manage to follow the plot if told slowly and clearly.

Watching TV, film and video: Can identify the main points of TV news item reporting events, accidents etc where the visuals support the commentary. Can follow a TV commercial or a trailer for, or scene from, a film, understanding what the actors are talking about, provided that the images are a great help in understanding and the delivery is clear and relatively slow.

Identifying cues and inferring: Can use an idea of the overall meaning of short utterances on everyday topics of a concrete type to derive the probable meaning of unknown words from the context. Can exploit

his/her recognition of known words to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words in short expressions used in routine everyday contexts.

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



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