



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.

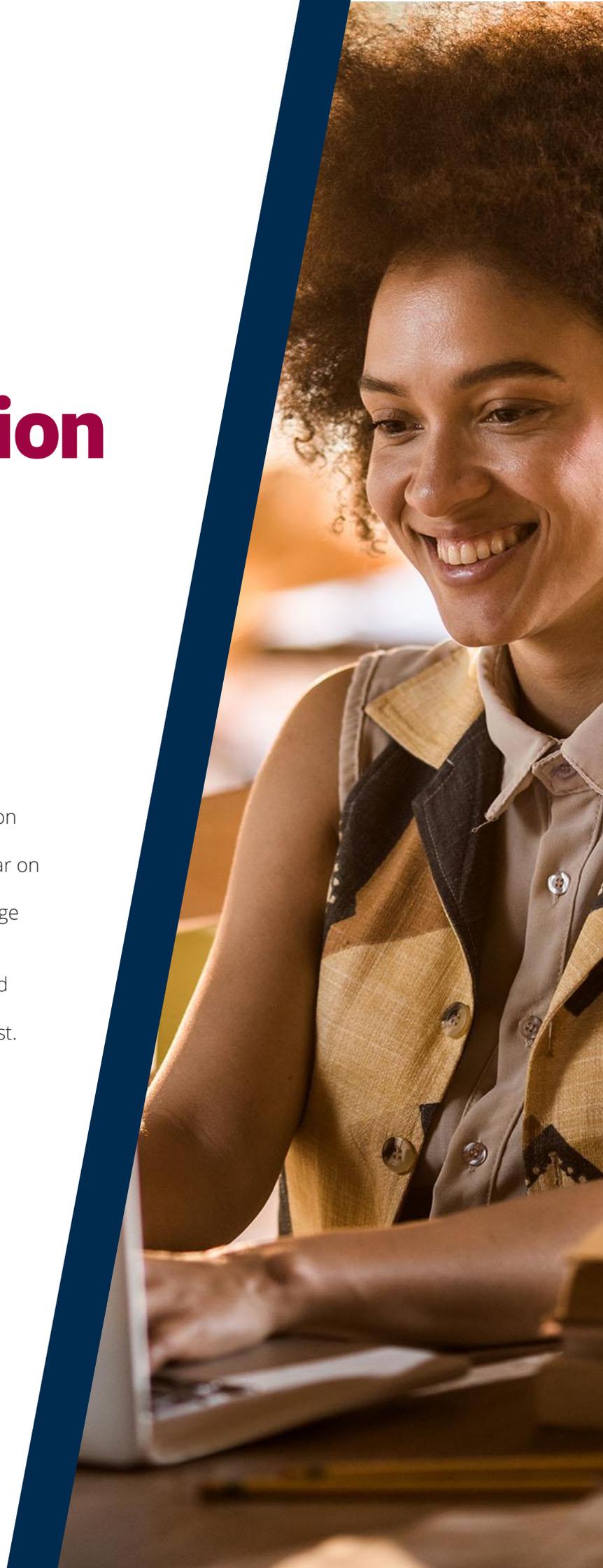
Version 4.0

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

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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

Reading

At B1, B2, C1 and C2 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

Writing

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

- relevance and appropriacy of response
- coherence and structure
- grammar — range and accuracy
- vocabulary — range and accuracy

Skills for English B1

Skills, knowledge and understanding being assessed

Assessment structure

Component	Marks	Duration
Component 1: Speaking	30	Approx. 10 minutes
Component 2: Listening	30	Approx. 40 minutes
Component 3: Reading	30	60 minutes
Component 4: Writing	30	60 minutes

Note: B1 test-takers can choose to take components 1 and 2 only and be certificated for speaking and listening skills, or they may choose to be assessed on all four skills, taking components 1–4.

Topics covered at B1

Test-takers are expected to engage with topics listed at levels A1 and A2 as well as the following:

- the self
- family and culture
- work and study
- making choices
- hopes and plans
- past experiences
- forms and letters
- daily life
- the home, the neighbourhood and places to live
- getting things done
- free time and things to do
- media
- healthcare and wellbeing

- accidents and emergencies
- places of interest and getting there
- opinions, arguments, questions and answers
- talking about work and education in general terms
- advertisements, application forms and letters

B1 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.

B1 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>Topic exploration</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: 4–5 minutes</p>

<p>Part 3</p>	<p>Extended talk</p> <p>Test-takers are given a situation within which they present information in an extended talk, in response to 5 prompts provided on the task card.</p> <p>Tasks have a clear purpose such as giving advice to a friend. Test-takers can either limit their responses to the prompts provided on the task card or provide further information.</p> <p>Where the candidate’s response does not relate to the context of the task, test-takers will not be able to score the full range of marks available on the ‘Relevance and appropriacy of response’ criterion.</p> <p>Duration 4-5 minutes</p>
<p>Relevant CEFR descriptions</p>	<p>Overall oral production: Can sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field reasonably fluently, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.</p> <p>Sustained monologue: describing experience: Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest. Can relate a straightforward narrative or description in a linear sequence of points reasonably fluently. Can give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions. Can relate details of unpredictable occurrences, e.g. an accident. Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions. Can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions. Can describe events, real or imagined. Can narrate a story.</p> <p>Sustained monologue: giving information: Can explain the main points in an idea or problem with reasonable precision. Can describe how to do something, giving detailed instructions. Can report straightforward factual information on a familiar topic, e.g. to indicate the nature of a problem or to give detailed directions, provided he/she can prepare beforehand.</p> <p>Sustained monologue: putting a case: Can develop an argument well enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time. Can give simple reasons to justify a viewpoint on a familiar topic. Can express opinions or subjects relating to everyday life using simple expressions. Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions. Can say whether or not he/she approves of what someone has done and give reasons to justify this opinion.</p>

Overall spoken interaction: Can communicate with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field. Can exchange, check and confirm information, deal with less routine situations and explain why something is a problem. Can express thoughts on more abstract cultural topics such as films, books, music. Can exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling. Can enter unprepared into conversation on familiar topics, express personal opinions, and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.

Conversation: Can start up a conversation and help keep it going by asking questions. Can have relatively long conversations on subjects of common interest provided that the interlocutor makes an effort to support understanding. Can follow clearly articulated speech though may have to ask for repetition. May sometimes be difficult to follow when they are trying to say exactly what he/she would like to. Can express and respond to feelings. Can ask for a favour, can offer a favour and can respond if someone asks him/her to do a favour for them.

Informal discussion with friends: Can follow much of what is said provided interlocutors avoid very idiomatic usage and articulate clearly. Can express his/her thoughts about abstract or cultural topics. Can explain why something is a problem. Can give brief comments on the views of others. Can compare and contrast alternatives, discussing what to do, where to go, who or which to choose etc. Can give or seek personal views and opinions in discussing topics of interest. Can express belief, opinions, agreement and disagreement politely.

Goal-oriented co-operation: Can follow what is said though may ask for repetition. Can explain why something is a problem, discuss what to do next, compare and contrast alternatives. Can give brief comments on the views of others. Can make his/her opinions and reactions understood as regards possible solutions, or the question of what to do next, giving brief reasons and explanations. Can invite others to give their views on how to proceed.

Obtaining goods and services: Can deal with most transactions likely to arise while travelling. Can ask in a shop for an explanation of the difference between two or more products serving the same purpose in order to make a decision, posing follow-up questions as necessary. Can cope with less routine situations in shops etc, such as returning an unsatisfactory purchase. Can make a complaint.

Information exchange: Can exchange and confirm accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence. Can summarise and give his/her opinion about a short story, article, talk etc and answer further questions in detail. Can find out and pass on straightforward factual information. Can ask for and follow detailed directions. Can offer advice on simple matters within his/her field of experience.

Interviewing and being interviewed: Can provide concrete information required in an interview consultation. Can carry out a prepared interview, checking and confirming information. Can take some initiative in an interview. Can describe symptoms in a simple way and ask for advice when using health services. Can use a prepared questionnaire.

Addressing audiences: Can give a prepared presentation on a familiar topic within his/her field, outlining similarities and differences. Can give a prepared presentation which is clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision. Can take follow-up questions but may have to ask for repetition if the speech was rapid.

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.
- 3) Skills, knowledge and understanding assessed at B1 includes but is not limited to those assessed at A1 and A2.

B1 Listening

Format of Listening assessment

The Skills for English B1 Listening test has three parts. Test-takers will hear the recording twice

B1 Listening (approx. 40 mins)

	Focus
Part 1	<p>Test-takers listen to 10 short recordings, which may be dialogue or monologue, and answer a single three-option MCQ for each recording.</p> <p>Questions focus on identifying key information. The recording is played twice.</p> <p>Topics: everyday life contexts</p> <p>Number of questions: 10</p>
Part 2	<p>Test-takers listen to a conversation between two speakers (one male and one female), or possibly three speakers, where topics allow, exchanging information, and answer 10 3-option MCQs.</p> <p>Answers can come from all speakers.</p> <p>Questions focus on understanding of specific, detailed information, opinions, attitudes and feelings, agreement/disagreement, and negotiation of meaning.</p> <p>The recording is played twice.</p> <p>Topics: everyday issues, which can be resolved through discussion. A study context is possible where students discuss general study-related issues.</p> <p>Number of questions: 10</p>
Part 3	<p>Test-takers listen to an extended monologue, e.g. a talk on a topic of general interest such as a tourist site, or on a topic of general interest presented in a more academic context.</p> <p>Test-takers complete 2 sets of 5 items (10) set out as notes capturing information from the monologue by using either 10 drag and drop or 5</p>

	<p>notes completion (FIB) and 5 drag and drop. Notes are set out in two sets of 5 items to reduce reading load. Answers are provided in a pool of 10 options in total for each set.</p> <p>Focus: key information, main ideas, detailed or specific information, attitudes and opinions.</p> <p>The recording is played twice.</p> <p>Topics: can be work or study oriented but focus of questions must be general in nature and accessible to all test-takers.</p> <p>Number of questions: 10</p>
<p>Relevant CEFR descriptors</p>	<p>Overall listening comprehension: Can understand straightforward factual information about common every day or job-related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent. Can understand the main points of clear, standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school or leisure, including short narratives.</p> <p>Understanding conversation between other speakers: Can follow much of everyday conversation and discussion provided it takes place in standard speech and is clearly articulated in a familiar accent. Can generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her provided speech is clearly articulated.</p> <p>Listening as member of live audience: Can follow a lecture or talk within his/her field provided the subject matter is familiar and the presentation straightforward. Can distinguish between main ideas and supporting details in standard lectures on familiar subjects, provided these are delivered in clearly articulated standard speech. Can follow a straightforward conference presentation or demonstration with visual support on a topic or product within his/her field, understanding explanations given. Can understand the main points of what is said in a straightforward monologue like a guided tour, provided the delivery is clear and slow.</p> <p>Listening to announcements and instructions: Can understand simple technical information such as operating instructions for everyday equipment. Can follow detailed directions. Can understand public announcements at airports, stations and on planes, buses and trains, provided these are clearly articulated in standard speech with minimum interference from background noise.</p>

Listening to media and recordings: Can understand the information content of the majority of recorded or broadcast audio material of personal interest delivered in clear, standard speech. Can understand the main points of radio news bulletins and simpler recorded material about familiar subjects delivered relatively slowly and clearly. Can understand the main points and important details in stories and other narratives (e.g. holidays) provided the speaker speaks slowly.

Watching TV, film and video: Can understand a large part of many TV programmes on topics of personal interest such as interviews, short lectures, and news reports when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. Can follow many films in which visuals and action carry much of the storyline and which are delivered clearly in straightforward language. Can catch the main points of TV programmes on familiar topics when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. Can follow a TV commercial or 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.

Identifying cues and inferring: Can listen to a short narrative and predict what will happen next. Can follow a line of argument or the sequence of events in a story by focusing on common logical connectors (e.g. however, because). Can extrapolate the meaning of occasional unknown words from the context and deduce sentence meaning provided the topic discussed is familiar.

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



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