



First Certificate in English (FCE)

Exam specifications from December 2008

For examinations from December 2008, a number of improvements to the FCE examination are being introduced. These will have several benefits for candidates and teachers:

- a shorter exam which will be more appealing for candidates
- a more straightforward progression from FCE to CAE and CPE as the exams will be structured more similarly
- more straightforward for teachers who work with exams at different levels
- enhanced presentation of results to help candidates to understand how they have performed and provide more information for other users

- incorporation of new technologies which will simplify and speed up the administration process

This document gives an overview of the changes that have been made to FCE. For more information, a full Handbook for Teachers and sample papers are available online at www.CambridgeESOL.org/FCE

Advice for candidates preparing for the exam is online at www.CambridgeESOL.org/resources

FCE: Summary of changes and rationale

PAPER	CHANGE	RATIONALE
Paper 1 READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three tasks (instead of four) • reduced to one hour by removing Part 1 • testing focus for the multiple choice is widened • gapped task will only be in sentence form (without paragraphs as an alternative) <p>From: 1 hour 15 minutes 35 questions To: 1 hour 30 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the new format is shorter, but has a broader test focus • item numbers will be fixed by part which simplifies the format • no alternative tasks will be available, which will make it more accessible for preparation
Paper 2 WRITING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes the production of emails • reduction in word length for Part 1 • includes a review task type • includes a rationalisation of the set text question <p>From: 1 hour 30 minutes To: 1 hour 20 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing more briefly is a relevant real life skill, so the output required from Part 1 is reduced. The letter or email are compulsory because writing these is an important skill relevant to the candidature • the writing of email messages is added because they are used in modern life • a review task is added to Part 2 to increase the choices and broaden the candidates' experience • the set text questions will be related to a specific book • set books are reduced from five to two, as patterns of choice are changing
Paper 3 USE OF ENGLISH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduced to 45 minutes by removing Part 4 (error correction) and amending lengths of the other parts <p>From: 1 hour 15 minutes 65 questions To: 45 minutes 42 questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • four of the five current tasks remain the same • the grammar that the error correction task tests is tested elsewhere in the paper • the skill of error correction can be tested through the writing paper
Paper 4 LISTENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • format to be standardised with other ESOL general English listening tests by having only one task available in each part • the length and test focus are not affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a single task type in each section will improve comparability between versions of the test and standardise the candidate experience. Candidates will know exactly which tasks to expect • the sentence completion task will be retained in Part 2 as this is more suitable to the level than note-taking • for Part 4, the multiple-choice task will be the only task retained; ensuring reliability between versions and over time
Paper 5 SPEAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questions to be added to the visuals page in Parts 2 and 3 • no change to the overall timing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adding questions to the visuals page will help candidates to recall the tasks. This will standardise their responses and improve the comparability of the tasks • Part 4 is enhanced with additional prompts for the interlocutor

FCE: Specifications from December 2008

PAPER	TIMING/LENGTH	TASK TYPES AND FORMAT	TEST FOCUS
READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour • 30 questions • length of texts: about 550–700 words per text • about 2,000 words overall 	Part 1 multiple choice Part 2 gapped text – sentences removed Part 3 multiple matching	Part 1 detail, opinion, gist, attitude, deducing meaning, text organisation features (exemplification, comparison, reference), tone, purpose, main idea Part 2 text structure, cohesion and coherence Part 3 specific information, detail, opinion and attitude
WRITING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour 20 minutes • 2 parts 	Part 1 compulsory letter or email (120-150 words) Part 2 Q2-4 – choice of one task from the following: article, letter, report, essay, review, story Q.5 – task based on set texts – task types from: article, essay, report, review, letter; two set books to be used, with a question on each text (120-180 words)	Part 1 focus on expressing opinions, justifying, persuading, comparing, recommending, suggesting, advising, apologising, describing and explaining Part 2 varying focuses according to task, including: expressing opinions, justifying, comparing, recommending, advising, describing and explaining
USE OF ENGLISH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 minutes • 42 questions 	Part 1 multiple choice cloze Part 2 open cloze Part 3 word formation Part 4 key word transformations	Part 1 lexical/lexico-grammatical Part 2 grammatical/lexico-grammatical Part 3 lexical/lexico-grammatical Part 4 lexical and grammatical
LISTENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 minutes • 30 questions 	Part 1 multiple choice – eight short unrelated extracts; monologues or exchanges between interacting speakers; one question per text Part 2 sentence completion – a monologue or text with interacting speakers Part 3 multiple matching – five short related monologues. One task, requiring selection from list of six options. Part 4 multiple choice – a monologue or text involving interacting speakers. All texts will be heard twice.	Part 1 general gist, detail, function, purpose, attitude, opinion, relationship, topic, place, situation, genre, agreement Part 2 detail, specific information, stated opinion Part 3 as for Part 1 Part 4 opinion, attitude, gist, main idea, specific information
SPEAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 minutes • 4 parts 	Part 1 conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate (spoken questions) Part 2 individual one-minute 'long turn' for each candidate with a brief response from the second candidate (each candidate is given two photographs with a question) Part 3 two-way conversation between the candidates (visual and written stimuli, with spoken instructions) Part 4 discussion on topics related to Part 3 (spoken questions)	Part 1 general interactional and social language Part 2 organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions Part 3 sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc. Part 4 expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing

Total Time: 3 hours 59 minutes