

Introduction

The First Certificate in English is an examination offered by Cambridge University. The exam was first offered in 1939, and has been updated regularly ever since.

The people who sit this exam need to show an overall ability to communicate, but the exam is also subdivided into different skills and subskills. The four main skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are tested. A fifth test component (Use of English) focuses on language knowledge structures.

Reading

In the exam

Part 1 has a long text followed by eight multiple choice questions. These test your understanding of content and text organisation.

Part 2 is a text where seven sentences have been removed and placed in jumbled order after the text, with an eighth sentence which doesn't fit in any of the gaps. You must place each sentence in one of the gaps. The task tests your understanding of how texts are structured.

Part 3 consists of one long text, or up to six shorter texts. It is preceded by 15 questions. You have to match statements to the text concerned.

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Like the exam, Reading is divided into three parts. Each part contains three questions. These questions allow you to practise the subskills required in reading. These include a detailed understanding of a text — such as expression of opinion, attitude, purpose, gist, tone and recognising the main idea. Additional subskills include locating specific information and understanding text structure.

Writing

In the exam

Part 1 contains one question that you must answer. You're given some kind of written material (up to 160 words). You need to write a letter or an email using this material.

Part 2 contains five questions. You need to choose one and answer it. The first three questions ask you to write an article, an essay, a letter a review or a story. The fifth question has two options, and is based on one of two prescribed books that you've read.

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Like the paper, this section is divided into two parts. Unlike the paper, this section doesn't ask you to create a piece of writing. Rather, it allows you to practise the subskills needed to become a capable writer. These include sequencing devices, sentence patterns, describing words, and using the correct tense.

Use of English

In the exam

Part 1 is a text in which there are 12 gaps. Each gap represents a missing word or phrase. The text is followed by 12 sets of four words or phrases. Each set corresponds to a gap. You need to choose one of the four words or phrases which fill the gap correctly.

Part 2 is a text with 12 gaps. You need to think of a word which will fill the gap correctly.

Part 3 is a text containing 10 gaps. At the end of some of the lines, and separated from the text, there is word in capital letters. You need to form an appropriate word from the given word to fill the gap.

Part 4 is eight questions. Each question contains a lead-in sentence, a key word, and a second sentence of which only the beginning and the end are given. You need to fill the gap in the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence. You can only use between two and five words. On of these words must be the key word.

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Like the paper, this section is divided into four parts. Each part allows you to practise subskills such as improving your vocabulary and grammar, by practising recognising prefixes and suffixes, prepositions and verbs.

Listening**In the exam**

Part 1 is a multiple choice based on a series of short unrelated extracts of approximately 30 seconds each. These are either monologues or exchanges between interacting speakers. There is one multiple choice per listening text. Each has three answer options.

Part 2 is a monologue or text involving interacting speakers and lasting approximately three minutes. You need to complete ten sentences with the information heard in the recording.

Part 3 is five short, unrelated monologues. Each one lasts approximately 30 seconds. The five multiple-matching questions which follow require you to select an option from a list of six.

Part 4 is a monologue or text involving interacting speakers and lasting approximately three minutes. There are seven multiple-choice questions, each with three options.

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Like the text, this section is divided into four parts. Each part allows you to practise your listening subskills: recognising purpose and intent, inferring attitude, forming an opinion, and listening for detail as well as overall understanding.

Speaking**In the exam**

Part 1 is a conversation between you and an interlocutor, with another candidate as well. It consists of spoken questions, and lasts for approximately three minutes.

Part 2 is an individual 'long turn' with a brief response from the other candidate. In turn, each of you is given a pair of photographs to talk about.

Part 3 is a two-way conversation between you and the other candidate. You'll be given spoken instructions with written and visual stimuli. You'll be asked to use these to form a decision about something.

Part 4 is a discussion on a topic related to the collaborative task of Part 3.

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Like the paper, this section is divided into four parts. Each part allows you to practise the subskills necessary in the Speaking Paper. These include activities where you compare and contrast images, and state an opinion about either the image or the statement given to you.

The Practice Tests

The two practice tests offered are designed to allow you to practice the format and content of each part of the First Certificate in English. Each test contains a range of topics in all papers to cover the themes likely to be encountered in the exam.

Vocabulary Strategies

MyFCE online contains additional vocabulary material. These exercises practise the type and level of vocabulary likely to occur in the exam in a context which develops your understanding of collocations or derivatives.