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Cambridge

B2 First

English Qualifications





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You can print this document if you wish, but it is better to read it on screen. Click the links in the document to access other useful online resources such as videos and practice tests, and to find the information you need.

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How to use this guide



Cambridge B2 First English Qualifications

This guide is designed to help you on each step of your learning journey. There's information and advice for how to prepare before the exam, what to expect in the exam and what will happen after the exam.

Preparing for the exam

Taking the exam

After the exam

This guide also includes lots of helpful boxes with **i** key information and advice, **★** study tips and **?** questions which people often ask about the exam:



It's important that you understand what you need to do in each part of the exam and follow all the instructions carefully.



Practice tests are useful but they are only one part of your preparation. You also need to practise your general language and communication skills!



Where can I find practice tests?

You can find **official exam preparation materials** online and in bookshops, including coursebooks and practice test books. There are also **free paper-based and digital sample tests** on our website.

You can find a **tutorial** for the digital test on our website.

Read these tips carefully – they will help you to feel well prepared for the exam and to avoid common mistakes or problems.

And ... **good luck with your exam!**

About the exam

B2 First is a qualification for learners who have an upper-intermediate level of English. The exam:

- ✓ tests your knowledge and ability in English at Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
- ✓ is accepted by thousands of institutions and employers around the world as evidence that you can use spoken and written English for study, work and life
- ✓ is based on extensive research to make sure that each paper is the right length and the right level, so your exam result will reflect your abilities fairly and accurately
- ✓ is designed to show your ability to use English in a range of different ways
- ✓ can be taken as a digital or paper-based exam.

The exam has four papers. Each one is equally important.

1. Reading and Use of English

This paper tests your reading skills, such as reading for detail or understanding how a text is organised, and your knowledge and use of a range of vocabulary and grammar.

2. Writing

This paper tests the content, communicative achievement, organisation and language of your written English.

**Your scores for
(Paper 1 (Reading) + Paper 1 (Use of English)
+ Paper 2 + Paper 3 + Paper 4) ÷ 5
= your exam result!**

3. Listening

This paper tests real-life listening skills, such as listening for general meaning, information, opinion or detail.

4. Speaking

This tests your ability to interact with other speakers, how you organise your ideas, your pronunciation and your use of grammar and vocabulary.



Do I need to pass all four papers?

No, it's possible to pass the exam if you do well in some papers but not in every paper. For example, if you do very well in Reading and Use of English, Writing and Listening, but you don't do very well in Speaking, it's still possible to pass the exam.

What's the difference between taking the exam on paper or digitally?

The content of the exams is the same, the scoring is the same and the final certificate is the same. Cambridge English offers two versions of the exam (digital and paper-based) just so you have more choice and flexibility in how you take it.

Preparing for the exam

A successful and enjoyable journey begins with good preparation. For B2 First, this means you should:

- practise your English in all four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking
- improve your grammar and vocabulary for communication at B2 level
- understand how the exam is organised and assessed
- understand what will happen on exam day.

Keep reading to find out more about how you can prepare for each paper in the B2 First exam.

Paper 1: Reading and Use of English

1 hour 15 minutes 7 parts	Parts 1–3	Three short texts (one text for each part), with different tasks. You must complete the gaps with different kinds of words.
	Part 4	No text. You must rewrite sentences in a different way.
	Part 5	One long text with six multiple-choice questions.
	Part 6	One text with six gaps. You must choose the correct sentence for each gap.
	Part 7	One text or several short texts, with 10 questions. You must match each question to something in the text(s).

? **Is there a wordlist for this exam?**
 No. Exams that are at CEFR Level B2 or above, like B2 First, do not have particular language specifications or vocabulary lists.

How is the digital exam different from the paper-based exam?
 On the Cambridge website, you'll find [more information about the digital exam](#) and a guide to [common questions and answers about this exam format](#).

★ **Follow time limits** when you do practice tests. This will help you prepare for the real exam, when you will have limited time to complete the tasks and fill in the answer sheet. (And remember, if you have extra time at the end of the Writing and the Reading and Use of English tests, you can go back to a task and look at it again.)

Self-study is very important when preparing for an exam, because sometimes you don't have a teacher or a book to help you. Try these ways to make your learning journey more personal:

- Write interesting and useful vocabulary in a notebook. Include the meaning, the pronunciation, an example sentence and a translation in your first language.
- Think about your learning goals: why are you studying for this exam? If you pass the exam, what will this qualification help you do in future?
- Don't be afraid to use English outside class with other English speakers in everyday situations. For example, you could tell a family member, classmate or friend about your day or post a comment in English in response to something on social media.

i There are many different types of text in the exam: newspaper and magazine articles, reports, fiction, advertisements, letters, messages and informational material (such as brochures, guides, manuals, etc.). Before you take the exam, it's important that you have seen these kinds of text before and that you know how to do the kind of tasks which appear in the exam.

Extra help online
 You can find a [sample test and self-study lesson plans on our website](#). Both of these can help learners who are preparing for the B2 First exam to practise different parts of the Reading and Use of English paper.

★ To improve your **reading skills**, it's really important to read many different types of text which you really enjoy. If you have a special interest or hobby, try reading about it in English as much as you can. You can read anything: blogs, books, magazine articles, social media, informational websites or encyclopaedias. The important thing is just to read as much as possible and to enjoy it!

For this paper you need to study things like **collocations** (words which often go together), **phrasal verbs**, **linking words** and to understand how writers use different words to express similar meanings. (All of these are important for the Writing paper, too!) When you're preparing for the exam, keep a notebook and write down vocabulary which you see often. You could use this to test yourself later.



Some common questions about Paper 1: Reading and Use of English



Are words like 'doesn't' and 'isn't' counted as one or two words?

Two words. To count the number of words, use the full form, e.g. didn't = did not = two words.



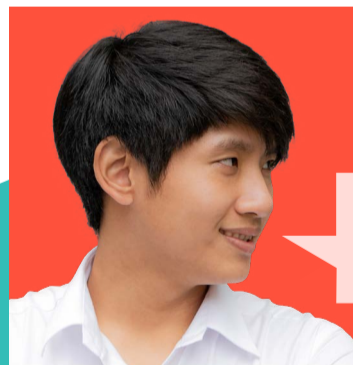
What happens if I make one small mistake in the key word transformation task (Part 4)? Do I get zero points?

The sentence has two parts, so you will receive 1 mark for correctly completing one part of the sentence, even if a small mistake means that you get no points for the other part.



What if I don't understand all the words in a text?

Just continue reading and try to understand as much as possible. Use the context to help you. In the exam, you can't use a dictionary, so it's important to be able to read without stopping to look up all the words.



Will I lose marks for incorrect answers?

No. A correct answer gets 1 or 2 marks, an incorrect answer gets 0 marks and no answer gets 0 marks. So if you're not sure about an answer, it is best to guess something!



Will I get one or two scores for the Reading and Use of English paper?

Two. Your Reading score is based on Parts 1, 5, 6 and 7, and your Use of English score is based on Parts 2, 3 and 4. Your Statement of Results will show both scores, plus three more: one score for Writing, one for Listening and one for Speaking. Each of these five scores is equally important when calculating your overall score.



Do ...

- ✓ Read the **sources, titles** and **subtitles** of the texts. These will help you choose the best answers.
- ✓ In Parts 1 and 2, read the words which come **after** the gaps. These words might affect the answer.
- ✓ In Part 3, remember to **change** the words that you write. They might have to change into a **negative** or a **plural**, so look carefully at the text to decide which form is best.
- ✓ In Part 4, only write **between two and five words**. Don't write out the full sentence!
- ✓ In Part 5, read the questions carefully and **check each option with the text** before rejecting it.
- ✓ In Part 6, check the words **around the gap** carefully, because the missing word(s) may be part of an idiom, fixed phrase or collocation.
- ✓ In Part 7, check that the completed paragraph makes sense in the text **as a whole**, because the missing sentence must fit the overall context.
- ✓ Check your **spelling** in all parts of the test. (American spelling is OK – but don't mix American and British.)

Don't ...

- ✗ Don't spend **too much time** on any one part of the paper and don't forget to **practise** doing the whole Reading test within the time limit.
- ✗ Don't try to answer any questions **before reading the whole text** first. It's important to understand the whole context.
- ✗ Don't assume that you have found the right answer if the same word appears **in the text and in an option**. You might need to look for a synonym or related word instead.
- ✗ Don't write **more than one answer** for any question, even if you think there are two possible answers.

If you're taking the test on paper ...

Do ...

- ✓ For the paper-based test, allow enough time to transfer your answers to the answer sheet **accurately and clearly**, because it will be scanned into a computer.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pen on the answer sheet. Use a pencil.** Answers written in pen cannot be read by the marking machine i.e. 0 points! Rub out any answers you want to change using an eraser.
- ✗ **Don't write the answers to any of the examples on your answer sheets.**



Paper 2: Writing

1 hour 20 minutes 2 parts	Part 1	Writing 140–190 words. There is only one question. You must write an essay which shows your opinion about the topic, using the ideas which are given in the question and one extra idea of your own.
	Part 2	Writing 140–190 words. There are three questions and you must choose only one. You could write an article, email, essay, letter, review or story.



There are four assessment criteria for the tasks in the Writing paper:

- ✓ **Content** (How well have you completed the task? Have you done what you were asked to do?)
- ✓ **Communicative Achievement** (Is the writing appropriate for the task? For example, is the style right for a magazine article? Have you used the right register, for example formal or informal?)
- ✓ **Organisation** (How is the piece of writing put together? Is it logical and ordered?)
- ✓ **Language** (Do you use a good range of vocabulary and grammar? Are there any mistakes which would make it difficult for the reader to understand?)

For both exam tasks, you receive marks from 0 to 5 for each of the four criteria. These scores are combined to calculate your final mark for the Writing paper.

Extra help online

You can find a **sample test and self-study lesson plans**. Both of these can help learners to prepare for the B2 First exam

Try the exam tasks on **Write & Improve** and get fast, free automated feedback on your writing.



You can learn a lot from reading other people's written work! Try the following:

1. Find a sample answer in a **coursebook or book of practice tests**.
2. Look at how the writer answers the different parts of the question.
3. Choose one of the assessment criteria which you find more difficult and look at what the writer does well. Take some notes and compare this to your own writing.

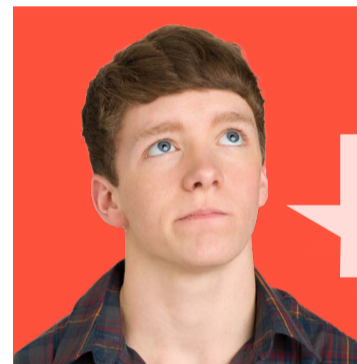
For example, for Organisation, you could look at how the writer organises their ideas into paragraphs. Then think about how they develop these ideas, and how they link ideas in each paragraph and between the paragraphs.

Some common questions about Paper 2: Writing



What if I write too much, or if I don't write enough?

The instructions will tell you how much to write. The most important thing is to answer the question completely and clearly. If you write too much, you will only lose marks if you have included details which aren't important or which confuse the reader. If you write a shorter answer which includes **all the required information**, this is OK.



How long should I spend on each part?

Both parts are worth the same number of marks and you can decide how much time to spend on each part. Just make sure you spend some time **planning** before you start writing each answer and **checking** your work after you have finished.



Is there a spell-checker in the test?

No! It's important to check your own answers and spelling before the end of the test.



What happens if I need more paper?

In the digital exam you only need extra paper to make notes. For the paper-based exam, you can raise your hand and indicate that you need more paper. Just remember at the end of the exam to submit **all** the paper you used. This includes any notes which you made to plan or prepare your answer.



Do ...

- ✓ Read every part of the question carefully and use the digital tools to **highlight parts of the question**, or, in the paper-based test, **underline important parts**.
- ✓ It's OK if you need to make corrections – just make sure they are **clear** so the examiner can understand what you have written!
- ✓ **Add detail** to the points in Part 1 if you can, using relevant ideas and information.
- ✓ Use a **range of vocabulary**, even if you are not completely sure about the correct spelling.
- ✓ **Check your grammar**, especially the ends of verbs, irregular past tenses, plural forms, question forms and word order.
- ✓ Use **formal or informal** language in the right way – you should know which is best for the task.
- ✓ Choose a Part 2 question that you feel **confident** you can write about.

Don't ...

- ✗ Don't use the **exact words** from the question paper **too much**. And if you use some key words from the question, make sure you spell them correctly!
- ✗ Don't mix **formal and informal** language. For example, don't use formal linking words in an informal letter.
- ✗ Don't type or write **addresses** for a letter. They are **not required**, so typing or writing these will waste time.

If you're taking the test on paper ...

Do ...

- ✓ **Write clearly** so your answers are clear and easy to read. However, it is not important if you write in CAPITALS in lower case, or if your writing is joined up or not.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pencil**. For this paper, you must write in pen.



Paper 3: Listening

About 40 minutes 4 parts	Part 1	Listen to several recordings about different topics. For each recording, answer a multiple-choice question. Each recording is about 30 seconds long and there could be one or more people speaking.
	Part 2	Listen to one person speaking for 3–4 minutes and complete 10 sentences with information that you hear.
	Part 3	Listen to five short recordings about the same topic. For each recording, choose the right answer from a list of eight options. Each recording is about 30 seconds long and has only one person speaking.
	Part 4	Listen to two people speaking together for 3–4 minutes and answer seven multiple-choice questions.



- ✓ In the exam, always read the questions before you start listening. Don't worry if you miss a question – use the questions to help you find your place. You will hear each recording twice.
- ✓ In the exam, if you can't hear the recording, raise your hand immediately so somebody can quickly help to fix the problem.

Extra help online

Try the **sample Listening test** on our website.

Listen to **Virtually Anywhere**, an audio series of seven episodes. It also includes activities to help you practise the language which is used in the episodes.



This paper tests different real-life skills, including listening for information, opinion or detail, and listening for the general meaning of the whole text. To practise, find an interesting video or audio clip online and share it with another English speaker, such as a friend or colleague. Choose something which you know you will disagree about! After listening, discuss it together. Use examples from the clip to support your opinions.

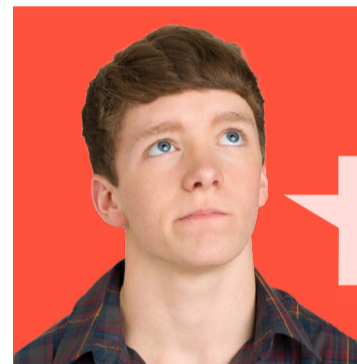
To improve your listening skills, it's important to listen to many different things in your free time which you really enjoy. You can find lots of video and audio material online related to your interests and hobbies, like podcasts, talks, radio stations, audiobooks and so on. Many of these come with subtitles or transcripts so you can read and listen at the same time. The important thing is just to listen in English as much as possible and to enjoy it!

Some common questions about Paper 3: Listening



How many times will I hear each recording?

You will hear each recording two times.



Where do I write my answers?

In the digital test, you type your answers onto the screen and they are saved automatically. For the paper-based test, you must write all your answers on a **separate answer sheet**. While you're listening, you can write on the question paper, but you must transfer your answers to the answer sheet. You will have 5 minutes at the end of the test to do this.



How important is spelling?

It's OK to make some small spelling mistakes in the Listening paper of this exam, but it must be clear what you were trying to write.



What if I can't hear the recording?

For the digital test, all candidates will wear headphones and you can change the volume. For the paper-based test, if you can't hear, raise your hand immediately so that someone can resolve the problem.



Do ...

- ✓ Listen to **all** the instructions in the test – and read them too! It's really important to understand what you're listening for and what you have to do.
- ✓ Use the time **before** each recording to prepare to listen: read the question and think about the context.
- ✓ While you listen, **use the information on the page to help you follow** the recording.
- ✓ In Part 2, look carefully at what is **before and after the gap** and think about the kind of information that you are listening for. **Only include the missing information** on the screen or answer sheet.
- ✓ Try to answer the questions when the recording is played the **first** time. Then you can check these answers when you hear the recording for the **second** time.
- ✓ Answer **all** the questions, even if you're not sure.

Don't ...

- ✗ Don't use **different words** in Part 2. You should write the exact word(s) or number(s) that you hear in the recording.
- ✗ Don't spend **too much time** thinking about a difficult question. You might miss the next one!
- ✗ **Don't rush** to type or write an answer for Parts 1, 3 and 4 just because you heard **one word or phrase**. You need to concentrate on the overall meaning.

If you're taking the test on paper ...

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pen on the answer sheet. Use a pencil.** Answers written in pen cannot be read by the marking machine i.e. 0 points! Rub out any answers you want to change using an eraser.

Paper 4: Speaking

Candidates are tested together in pairs or groups of three. If there are three candidates together, the test lasts longer so each candidate gets enough time to speak.

About 14 minutes 4 parts	Part 1	Each candidate has a brief general conversation (about 2 minutes) with the examiner.
	Part 2	You and the other candidate(s) each speak for 1 minute about two photographs. After the other candidate has spoken, you also have 30 seconds to respond to what they said.
	Part 3	You and the other candidate(s) discuss and complete a decision-making task.
	Part 4	The candidates and the examiner all speak together about topics related to the task in Part 3.



Don't try to prepare and memorise general answers for the Speaking or Writing tests. They almost certainly won't answer the questions which you are asked.

Extra help online

Watch an example **Speaking test video** and read the examiners' commentary in the Exam Essentials on our webpage.



If you don't know about a topic in the Speaking paper, do not speak about something else! You need to show your language skills, not your knowledge about a specific subject.

It might help you to practise some strategies in advance, such as:

- how to explain that you don't know a lot about a topic
- how to connect this topic logically to something you are more familiar with, so that you still answer the examiner's question.
- describing what a friend or family member might say about the topic instead.

Like all language skills, your speaking will improve if you practise more. Speak to different people, in different situations about different topics. You can also practise for Part 2 of the Speaking test by using podcasting or video websites to record yourself, then you can listen back to see what you could improve.

Some common questions about Paper 4: Speaking



Can I do the Speaking test with another student from my class?

Ask your exam centre. Different exam centres have different rules about this. But there is no evidence that candidates perform better or worse in the Speaking test if they know their partner. Some people might feel more relaxed and confident, but other candidates may find this situation difficult or unnatural.



What if my partner for the Speaking test is better than me at speaking skills?

Examiners are specially trained for situations where one candidate is stronger or weaker, or if one person talks too much or not enough. Don't worry – they will make sure you get a fair opportunity to show your speaking skills in the test.



How is the Speaking test done in the digital exam?

It's the same as the paper-based exam. You take the Speaking test together with one or two other candidates, and there are two examiners.



Why are there two examiners for the Speaking test?

The two examiners are doing different jobs. One person is an **interlocutor**, which means they speak to you and manage the test. The other person is an **assessor**, who only listens and does not participate in the test. Together, the interlocutor and the assessor decide how well you performed.



Do ...

- ✓ Listen carefully to the **instructions and questions** during the test, so you can respond appropriately.
- ✓ **Speak clearly** so that both the interlocutor and assessor can hear you.
- ✓ Use **all the opportunities** that you are given to speak in the test, and extend your responses whenever possible.
- ✓ **Listen to your partner** when it is their turn to speak.
- ✓ Ask the examiner to **repeat the question or instructions** if you don't understand.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't prepare long answers in advance**, and don't simply learn and practise a speech. You must answer the question which the examiner asks you in the test.
- ✗ Don't talk at the same time as your partner or **interrupt** them suddenly when they are speaking.
- ✗ Try not to leave **long or frequent pauses**, try to speak as naturally as you can.
- ✗ Don't worry **if the examiner interrupts you** when you are still speaking. This shows that you have spoken enough. Part of the examiner's job is to control the time limits of the test.

Taking the exam

Even after lots of preparation, many people still feel nervous on exam day. That's why it's really important to feel ready and to know what to expect. Watch the [What to expect on exam day](#) video.



Before exam day, you should:

- ✓ **Register for the exam.** If you are preparing for the exam as part of a course at a school, your school will register you. If you are studying independently, you can [look online to find a centre that offers the exam](#) and register directly with them. They will give you advice about preparation and tell you how much your exam will cost.
- ✓ **Check the date, time and address** of your exam. Your centre will send you this information.
- ✓ **Sign up for our free online results service.** The fastest way to get your results is to register with our [Results Service for Candidates](#). When you register for the exam, you'll be given your Candidate ID Number and your Secret Number. You'll need these details to register to receive your results online.
- ✓ **Check that you know where the exam is happening and how to get there**, because you must arrive **before** the exam starts.



You should register with our free [Results Service for Candidates](#) a few weeks before your exam.



Can I choose to take different exam papers on different days?

No, the Speaking test is the only paper which usually happens on a different day. All the other papers must be taken together on the same day.

Do I need to bring anything with me on exam day?

Yes, you should bring:

1. Identification (for example, your passport or national ID card). It must be the original document with your photo and it must be valid on the day of your exam.
2. Pens (black or dark blue).
3. Pencils (B or HB) and an eraser.
4. A clear plastic bottle of water.

Your exam centre will have extra pens and pencils if you need them.

You **cannot** bring your mobile phone or other electronic items inside the exam room. Your exam centre can tell you if you should leave these at home or if they can keep them somewhere safe during the exam.



Top tips for exam day

- ✓ In the Reading and Use of English and Writing papers, **you can do the tasks in any order**, so you might want to start with the questions which you find easier. Just make sure that you type or write your answers in the correct order on the screen or the answer sheet!
- ✓ It's important to have enough energy when you're taking an exam! Before exam day, check with your exam centre if it's possible to buy food and drink there. **If not, you might want to bring something to eat.** You can't bring food to your desk, but you can eat it during breaks.
- ✓ Check you know what **you can and can't do in the exam room**. For example, you can't bring food to your desk with you but you can bring a clear plastic bottle of water. All of this information is in the Summary Regulations, which you can read online before exam day. Your exam centre will also provide a copy of these rules.
- ✓ There will be a clock or timer in the exam room (or on your screen if you're taking the digital exam). Remember to **use the time well**. **Try not to panic** by looking at the clock every few minutes!
- ✓ **Follow all instructions carefully.** In the digital exam, the instructions will be on your screen. In the paper-based exam, they will be on the exam paper. If you have any questions, if you need help or if you want to leave the room, raise your hand to ask the invigilator (the person who helps manage the exams).
- ✓ Your exam centre will **take your photo**. They might also make a note of your **passport or ID number**. These steps are very important if you want to use your exam result in future for immigration or higher education.
- ✓ Finally ... try to **sleep well the night before** your exam!



During the exam, you must not talk to other people or try to see what they are writing or typing.

In the digital test, the timer will tell you how much time you have left, and the test will finish when your time is up. At the end of the paper-based exam, the invigilator will tell you to stop writing and you must stop **immediately**. Then you must give them all your papers, including the question papers, answer sheets and any notes which you took, and wait in your seat. The invigilator will tell you when you can leave the room.



After the exam

Well done! You prepared, you took the exam and now you're just waiting for your results. So what happens now?

Getting your results and certificate

All candidates receive a **Statement of Results**. You can access this **online**. If you are successful in the exam, you will also receive a **certificate**. This is sent to your exam centre.

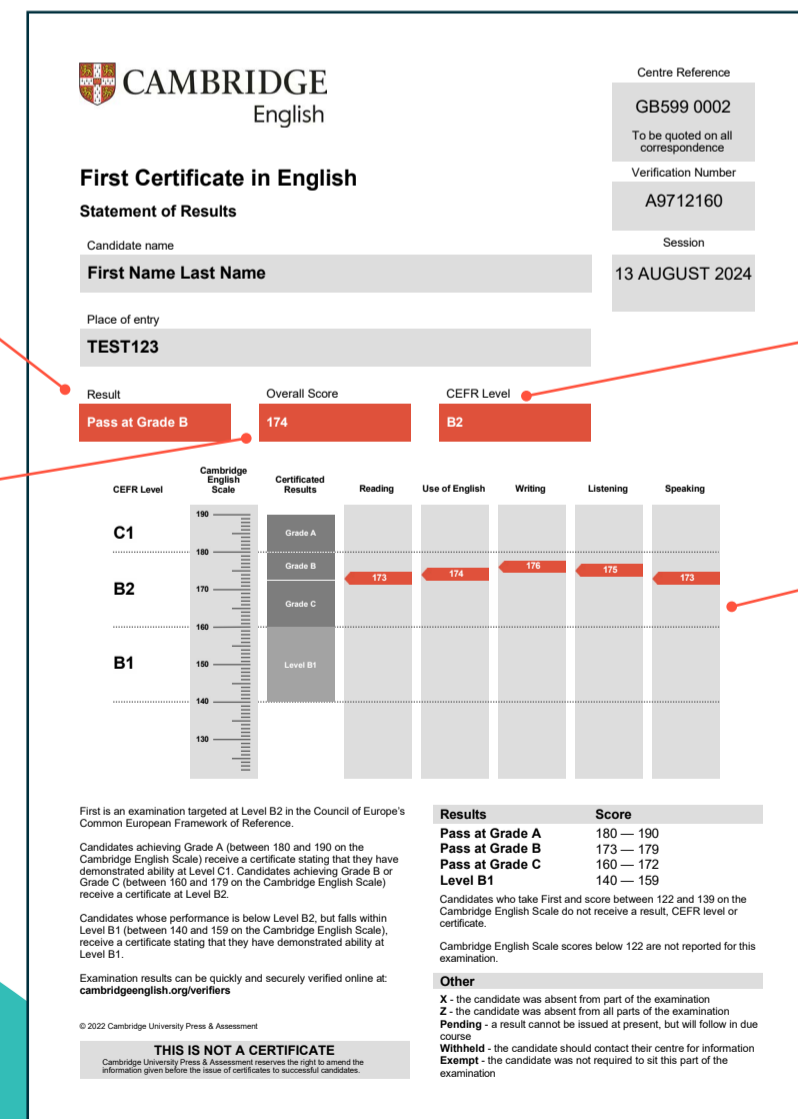
	Digital exam	Paper-based exam
Statement of Results	1-2 weeks after the exam	4-6 weeks after the exam
Certificate	3-4 weeks after the exam	7-9 weeks after the exam

Your Statement of Results will look like this:



your grade for the whole exam

your score on the Cambridge English Scale for the whole exam (this is called the 'overall score')



the CEFR level (B2) of the whole exam

your score on the Cambridge English Scale for each of the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and Use of English



What does my 'overall score' mean?

Your overall score uses the Cambridge English Scale to show how well you did in the exam.

If you score ...	You will receive ...	Your certificate will show ...
180 or more (grade A)	a certificate for B2 First	... that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level C1.
160-179 (grade B or C)	a certificate for B2 First	... that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level B2.
140-159	a certificate from Cambridge English	... that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level B1.
139 or below	You will not receive a certificate.	

What happens if I don't pass one of the papers?

You can't fail a paper. Your 'overall score' is based on the whole exam, so it's possible to pass the exam even if you don't do very well in one paper. Your Statement of Results will show your overall score and your scores for the different parts of the exam.

How can I receive my results online?

You'll need your Candidate ID Number and Secret Number to register with the **Results Service for Candidates**. You can find these numbers on the Confirmation of Entry document from your exam centre.

How can a university, college or employer check my exam results?

They can use the online **Results Verification Service**. You will need to give them your Candidate ID Number and Secret Number. If you've lost these numbers, the centre where you took your exam can provide them.



If you do not want to prepare for another exam but you want to continue developing and improving your English, there are many things you could do. For example:

- Continue to read and listen to things in English which interest you, for example novels, television shows, blogs or podcasts.
- Join a club or project which involves reading (like a book club) or writing (like a Facebook group where members submit their own short stories).
- Continue to keep a vocabulary notebook. Add any interesting or useful words and phrases which you learn from the things you read and listen to in English.

Next steps in your learning journey

With your B2 First qualification, you could:

- **Begin a course of higher education.** Cambridge English Qualifications are **officially accepted by thousands of colleges and universities globally**.
- **Travel, study or work abroad.** Cambridge English Qualifications are so well known all around the world, they can give you opportunities in other countries.
- **Prepare for the next level: C1 Advanced.** A C1 Advanced qualification will help you develop the skills for studying, working or living in English-speaking countries.



Where your world grows

Find out more at
cambridge.org/english

We believe that English can unlock a lifetime of experiences and, together with teachers and our partners, we help people to learn and confidently prove their skills to the world.

Where your world grows

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