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Information for candidates

Cambridge B1 Preliminary

English Qualifications





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Contents

How to use this guide	4
About the exam	5
Preparing for the exam	6
Paper 1: Reading	7
Paper 2: Writing	11
Paper 3: Listening	15
Paper 4: Speaking	19
Taking the exam	22
Top tips for exam day	23
After the exam	24
Getting your results and certificate	24
Next steps in your learning journey	25

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.

You can navigate the document by using the buttons on each spread:

[Previous page](#)
 [Next page](#)
 [First page](#)
 [Previous view](#)

How to use this guide

Cambridge B1 Preliminary

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:

i 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. There are also **free sample tests and materials on the Cambridge English website**.

You can also 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

B1 Preliminary is a qualification for learners who have an intermediate level of English. The exam:

- ✓ tests your knowledge and ability in English at Level B1 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 in digital or paper-based formats.

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

1. Reading

This paper shows you can read and understand the main points from signs, newspapers and magazines.

2. Writing

This paper shows you can use vocabulary and structure correctly.

**Your scores for
(Paper 1 + Paper 2 + Paper 3 + Paper 4) ÷ 4
= your exam result!**

3. Listening

This paper tests your ability to follow and understand a range of spoken materials including announcements and discussions about everyday life.

4. Speaking

This paper shows how good your spoken English is as you take part in conversation by asking/answering questions and talking, for example, about your likes and dislikes.



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, 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 different versions of the exam 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 B1 Preliminary, this means you should:

- practise your English in all four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking
- improve your grammar and vocabulary for communication at B1 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 B1 Preliminary exam.



Is there a wordlist for this exam?

Yes! You can [find the wordlist online for B1 Preliminary](#). This list provides some useful words that you can prepare to use, or just to understand, in the exam.

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 papers, 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.

Paper 1: Reading

45 mins 6 parts 32 questions	Part 1	Read 5 short texts, each with three possible descriptions. You must choose the correct description for each text.
	Part 2	Read 5 short descriptions of people and 8 short texts to match with them. You must match each description to one text.
	Part 3	Read 1 text with 5 multiple-choice questions.
	Part 4	Read 1 text with 5 gaps. You must choose the correct sentence for each gap.
	Part 5	Read 1 text with 6 gaps. You must choose the correct word for each gap.
	Part 6	Read 1 text with 6 gaps. You must write 1 word in each gap.



There are many different types of text in the exam: signs, notices, packaging information, short newspaper and magazine articles, notes, text messages, emails, 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 other self-study materials](#) on our website. Both of these can help you to practise different parts of the Reading 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!

The Reading paper tests how well you can read in different ways. To practise:

- Try to read a text quickly to get the main idea before you read it in more detail.
- Read a text to find out specific information. For example, visit a cinema website to find out when a film is on.
- Read some texts very carefully, so that you understand as much as possible, including what the writer thinks or feels about the topic.

You will need to read in all of these different ways in the Reading test!

Some common questions about Paper 1: Reading



In the digital exam, can I see all the text and questions at the same time?

You might have to scroll up and down to read the whole text and see all the questions in the digital exam paper.



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

Just continue reading and try to understand as much as possible. Use the context to help you. In the exam, you can't ask what a word means nor 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 mark, 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!



Do ...

- ✓ Look carefully at the **instructions** for each part. They will tell you what to do.
- ✓ Look at the **titles** of the longer texts. The titles will help you to understand what the text is about and where it comes from.
- ✓ Read the texts and the questions carefully **before** you try to answer a question.
- ✓ **Answer all the questions**, even if you're not sure. Always choose an answer for each multiple-choice question.
- ✓ Look at **practice tests** before your real exam so that you know all the task types.
- ✓ Use the tools in the digital test, such as **highlighting** and **taking notes**, to help you.

Don't ...

- ✗ Don't choose an answer just because you see one word! **Read all the options carefully** first.
- ✗ Don't worry if you don't know the meaning of a word. Try to **guess** what it means.
- ✗ Don't spend **too much time** on one part of the test and don't forget to **practise** doing the whole Reading test within the time limit.

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

Do ...

- ✓ Check that you have marked your answers **in the correct place** on the answer sheet.
- ✓ Make sure that you transfer your answers to the answer sheet **accurately and clearly**, because it will be scanned into a computer.
- ✓ If you want to **change an answer**, use an **eraser** to rub it out.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pen** on the answer sheet. Use a pencil. It's easier to correct answers if you change your mind, and the marking machine can't read answers that are written in pen.
- ✗ **Don't write more than one answer** for any question, even if you think there are two possible answers.



Paper 2: Writing

45 mins 2 parts	Part 1	Writing approximately 100 words. There is only one question. You must respond to an email using the ideas which are given in the question.
	Part 2	Writing approximately 100 words. There are two questions and you must choose only one. You could write an article about a topic or write a story following the first sentence, which you are given.

i **Extra help online**
You can find a **sample test and other self-study materials** on our website. Both of these can help you to prepare for the Writing paper.
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! Find a model answer in a **coursebook or book of practice tests** to see what good answers at B1 level are like.
Here are some ideas for preparing for the Writing tasks.

- Write short messages or emails to friends, family or colleagues, and encourage them to write back to you.
- Learn how to do things in your writing like describing, inviting, suggesting, thanking and reminding.
- Practise writing emails, articles and stories that are at least 100 words, so that you know what this number of words looks like.
- When you practise answering exam questions, try not to use the language that is in the question; write this in your own words instead.
- Practise writing with the same time limit as in the exam.
- If you're going to take the digital exam, practise typing your answers on a keyboard and editing your work on-screen.
- Always check your writing for spelling, grammar and vocabulary mistakes.

Some common questions about Paper 2: Writing



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

The instructions in the test 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 might waste time or include unnecessary or confusing details. If your answer is too short, you might miss some important information! The digital Writing test has an automatic word count and you can easily edit your work.



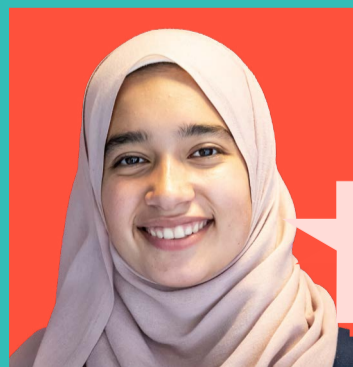
How long should I spend on each part?

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 don't forget to 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 digital test?

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



Can I plan and make notes?

Yes, you will be given paper that you can use to plan and make notes for the Writing test. If you need more paper, raise your hand. Remember to leave all the paper in the exam room after the exam has finished.



Do ...

- ✓ Read every part of the question carefully and **underline important parts**.
- ✓ 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 and word order.
- ✓ **Check your spelling carefully**.
- ✓ Give yourself time to **write, check and edit** your work. If you do change anything, make sure that your writing is easy to read.
- ✓ 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 write an answer which you memorised** before the exam. You must write something which is a response to the instructions and information given in the test.
- ✗ Don't mix **formal and informal** language. Make sure you know who you are writing to by reading the instructions.

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

Do ...

- ✓ **Write your answers on the correct part of the answer sheet**. Your test centre will also provide paper for planning, making notes, etc.
- ✓ **Write clearly** so your answers are easy to read. However, it is not important if you write in CAPITALS or lower case, or if your writing is joined up or not.
- ✓ It's OK if you need to make corrections – just make them **clearly** so the examiner can understand what you have written!

Don't ...

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



Paper 3: Listening

About 30 minutes 4 parts 25 questions	Part 1	Listen to 7 short recordings, each with just one or two people speaking. For each recording, choose the correct image from 3 options.
	Part 2	Listen to 6 short dialogues and understand the general meaning. For each dialogue, choose the correct answer from 3 options.
	Part 3	Listen to 1 person speaking and complete 6 gaps in a written text with 1 or 2 words or a number or a date or a time.
	Part 4	Listen to 2 people speaking together and answer 6 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.

Extra help online

Try the [sample listening tests](#) on our website.

Try the [extra practice activities](#) 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.



Try listening to people speaking as much as you can, even if you can't understand everything. Listen to people speaking in different accents, as you may hear different accents in the test. You can find many different things to listen to online, including podcasts or radio or TV programmes from different countries around the world. You may find it easier to watch videos so that you can see the person speaking while you're listening.

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 have 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**.



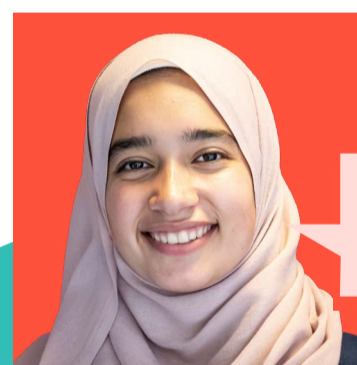
Can I pause the recording?

No, you cannot pause the recording during the Listening test.



I have hearing difficulties. Could I lose marks because of this?

No. You or your teacher must contact your **Cambridge test centre to make special arrangements**.



How important is spelling in Part 3?

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. And if the recording gives a word letter by letter (for example, a person's name), then you must spell this correctly.



What if I can't hear the recording?

In the **digital** test, you wear headphones and can change the volume at any time during the test.

In the **paper-based** exam, if you can't hear the recording, raise your hand immediately so somebody can quickly help to fix 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.
- ✓ Look at the **questions, text and pictures** and think about what kind of information you are going to hear.
- ✓ While you listen, **use the information on the screen to help you follow** the recording.
- ✓ 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 panic** if you don't understand everything that you hear – you can probably understand a lot even if you don't understand every word.
- ✗ Don't spend **too much time** thinking about a difficult question. You might miss the next one!
- ✗ **Don't rush** to choose an answer for Part 2 just because you heard **one word or phrase**. You need to concentrate on the general meaning.

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

Do ...

- ✓ 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 6 minutes at the end of the test to do this.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pen on the answer sheet. Use a pencil.** It's easier to correct answers if you change your mind, and the marking machine can't read answers that are written in pen. Use an eraser if you make a mistake and want to change an answer.



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 12 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 1 photograph.
	Part 3	You and the other candidate(s) look at some images and have a discussion.
	Part 4	The candidates and the examiner all speak together about topics related to the task in Part 3.

i **Extra help online**
 Watch an example of a **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. Before the exam, think about how you could:

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

The best way to improve your speaking is to speak as much English as you can with your friends, family, colleagues and teacher. Try to talk about different things. Practise asking questions to find out what other people think.

You could look at a picture and practise talking about it for about a minute. You could also use podcasting or video tools to record yourself, then you can listen back and find ways to improve your language, vocabulary and pronunciation.

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 it doesn't matter if you already know your partner for the Speaking test. Some people might feel more relaxed and confident, but other people may find this situation difficult. The examiners are trained to give all candidates equal opportunities to do their best.



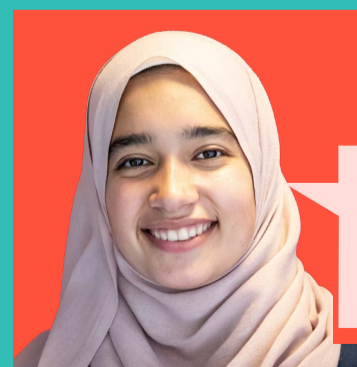
What if my partner for the Speaking test has better speaking skills or a very different personality?

Don't worry. Examiners are specially trained for situations where candidates have different abilities or personalities. Everyone will have the chance to show their best 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 ...

- ✓ **Speak clearly** so that both examiners can hear you.
- ✓ **Always try to answer** the questions. The examiners can't mark you if you don't say anything.
- ✓ Try to answer the examiner's questions with **more than just one word**.
- ✓ **Listen to your partner** and to the examiners when it is their turn to speak.
- ✓ Ask the examiner to **repeat the question or instructions** if you didn'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 when they are speaking.
- ✗ Don't worry if you think you've made a **mistake**. The important thing is that you communicate with your partner and with the examiner.
- ✗ 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.

i 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 (for example, digital watches) 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 Writing papers, **you can do the tasks in any order**, so you might want to start with the questions which you find easier. If you're taking the paper-based exam, just make sure that you write your answers in the correct order on 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 on the screen (or in the exam room if you're taking the paper-based test). Remember to **use the time well**. **Try not to panic** and look 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.

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

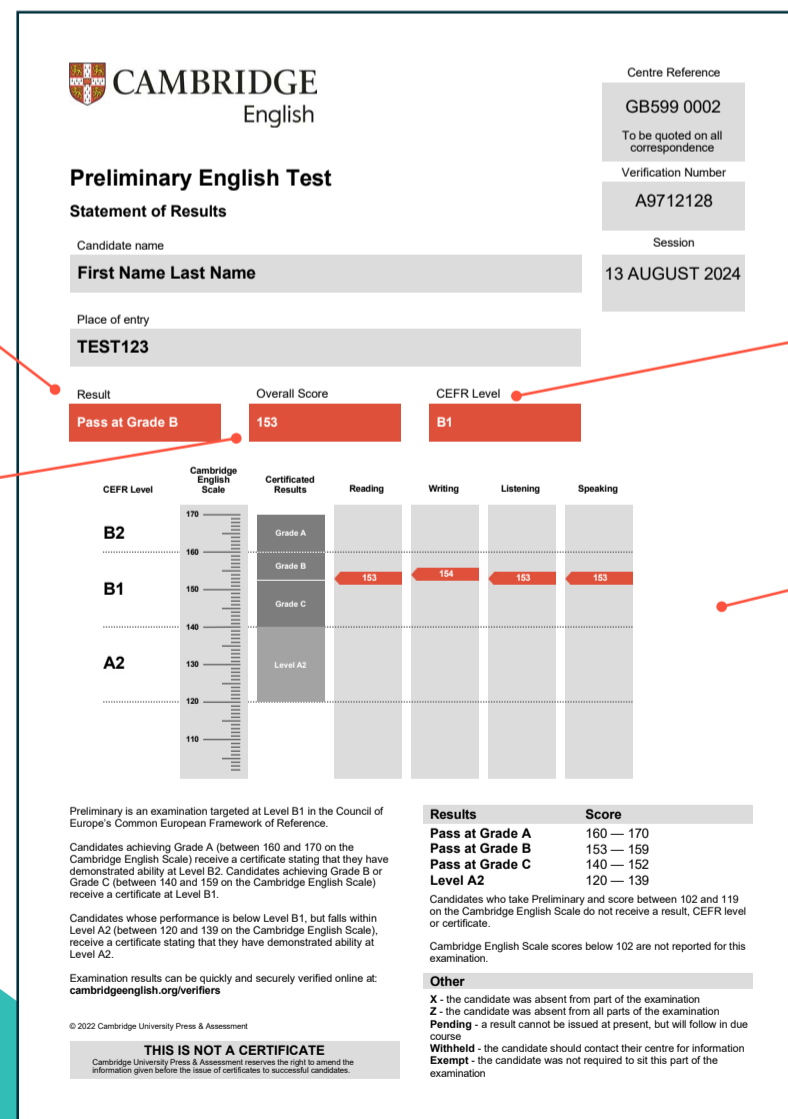
All candidates receive a **Statement of Results**. You can access this **online**. If you are successful in the exam, you will also receive a **certificate**. Both of these documents will be sent to your exam centre.

	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 (B1) of the whole exam

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



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 ...
160 or more (grade A)	a certificate for B1 Preliminary	... that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level B2.
140-159 (grade B or C)	a certificate for B1 Preliminary	... that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level B1.
120-139	a certificate from Cambridge English	... that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level A2.
119 or below	You will not receive a certificate, but you will receive a Statement of Results.	

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 vocabulary notes. 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 B1 Preliminary 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.** Because the Cambridge exams are so well known all around the world, they can give you opportunities in other countries.
- **Prepare for the next level: B2 First.** The B2 First qualification will help you develop the skills for studying, working or living in English-speaking environments.



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

This document was initially designed for print and as such does not reach accessibility standard WCAG 2.1 in a number of ways including missing text alternatives and missing document structure.

If you need this document in a different format contact **BrandAdmin.C@cambridgeenglish.org** telling us your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.



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