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**CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH**  
Language Assessment  
Part of the University of Cambridge

# Cambridge English **Business** Preliminary

*Achieve your ambitions in international business*

## **Information for candidates**



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Business English Certificates (BEC)

[www.cambridgeenglish.org/bec-preliminary](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/bec-preliminary)



## How to use this guide

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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## What does Cambridge English: Business Preliminary involve?

*Cambridge English: Business Preliminary* is the first of three *Cambridge English: Business Certificates* offered by Cambridge English Language Assessment. You can take it on the computer or as a pen and paper test. It is at Level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Cambridge English Language Assessment carries out extensive research to make sure that you get the fairest, most accurate result, and that the exam matches the range of uses for which you need English. Studying for the exam will give you very useful language skills for the business world.

### About the exam

Here's a summary of what's in the exam:

Paper details	What's in the paper?	What do I need to be able to do?
<p><b>Reading and Writing</b></p> <p>1 hour 30 minutes</p> <p>50% of the total marks for the exam</p> <p><i>continued overleaf</i></p>	<p>There are seven Reading tasks and two Writing tasks.</p> <p>In the <b>Reading</b> tasks you have to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>answer multiple-choice questions on five short texts</li> <li>match descriptions of people to short texts</li> <li>match statements to information given in a graph or graphs</li> <li>read a longer text and decide whether statements about the text are right or wrong or if the information is not given</li> <li>read a longer text and answer multiple-choice questions</li> <li>do a multiple-choice cloze task (a text with gaps and you choose the right option to fill each gap)</li> <li>read two short texts and fill in a form using information from the texts.</li> </ul>	<p>The reading skills you need include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading for the main idea</li> <li>finding specific information and reading for detail</li> <li>reading and transferring information</li> <li>understanding attitude, opinion and the writer's purpose</li> <li>interpreting visual information</li> <li>reading for gist, inference and global meaning</li> <li>understanding vocabulary and grammar in a short text.</li> </ul>





Paper details	What's in the paper?	What do I need to be able to do?
<i>Continued from previous page</i>	<p>In the <b>Writing</b> tasks you have to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>write a piece of internal business communication of 30–40 words (an email or message, for example)</li> <li>write a business letter or email of 60–80 words, based on an input text and some notes.</li> </ul>	<p>The writing skills you need include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the ability to write a short message which includes certain information</li> <li>the ability to write a longer piece of correspondence based on another text.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Listening</b> 40 minutes 25% of the total marks for the exam</p>	<p>The <b>Listening</b> paper has four parts and the tasks involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>answering multiple-choice questions on short conversations or monologues</li> <li>completing notes based on a conversation</li> <li>completing notes based on a monologue</li> <li>answering multiple-choice questions on a longer conversation or interview.</li> </ul>	<p>You need to be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listen for specific information in short and long conversations and monologues</li> <li>listen for gist and detailed meaning and to identify the attitudes and opinions of the speakers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Speaking</b> 12 minutes Paired: two candidates together 25% of the total marks for the exam</p>	<p>The <b>Speaking</b> test has three parts and the tasks involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>giving information about yourself and your opinions</li> <li>giving a short talk on a business-related topic</li> <li>discussing a business situation with the other candidate.</li> </ul>	<p>You need to be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>talk about yourself, your current situation and your plans</li> <li>give your opinion on business situations</li> <li>talk about some prompts for an extended period of time</li> <li>discuss a business situation with your partner.</li> </ul>

- ➔ Download a complete sample paper.
- ➔ Try a computer-based practice test.



Taking *Cambridge English: Business Certificates* will definitely show you the most efficient way to improve business English, and keep you motivated.

Yi Zhang, China



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## Before the exam – preparation

It is important to know exactly what you have to do in the exam as this will make you feel more confident! For example, in the Speaking test, knowing in advance about the kinds of task there will be will make it easier for you to show your true ability.

Learning business vocabulary and doing practice tests are certainly important, but the most important thing to work on is your English, improving your ability to communicate in listening, reading, writing and speaking.

To help you feel well prepared for *Cambridge English: Business Preliminary*, there is a range of **free exam preparation resources**, including:

- tips and FAQs for each exam paper
- sample papers and a computer-based practice test.

To help learners prepare for their exams, Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press have developed a range of **official preparation materials**, including coursebooks and practice tests.



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How much do you know about preparing for *Cambridge English: Business Preliminary*?

### Can you answer these questions?

1. *Are you testing my business knowledge?*
2. *Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?*
3. *How can I make sure I know the right kind of vocabulary?*
4. *What kinds of things should I read apart from coursebooks?*
5. *How can I best prepare for the Writing tasks?*
6. *How will my writing be assessed?*
7. *How can I improve my listening skills?*
8. *What is the best way to develop my speaking skills?*
9. *How will my speaking be assessed?*

Find the answers on the next page



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## ANSWERS

### Preparing for Cambridge English: Business Preliminary

#### 1. *Are you testing my business knowledge?*

This exam is a test of English language, but in a business context. If you are already in work, you will have the opportunity to make use of your experience in the Reading and Writing and Speaking papers. But 'business knowledge' here includes what you've learned about the subject if you are still a student, so you are not at any disadvantage if you have no work experience yet. It's the same in the Listening paper; we do not require you to have expert knowledge, but you do need to have a basic knowledge of business vocabulary and situations!

#### 2. *Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?*

You can download a sample paper [here](#), and the Cambridge English Language Assessment [website](#) has more information. If you are taking a computer-based exam, you can try a computer-based practice test [here](#). (Please note that this only works with the most recent version of Firefox.)

#### 3. *How can I make sure I know the right kind of vocabulary?*

There is a [wordlist](#) which will help you see the kinds of words that *Preliminary* candidates may find useful. A good learner's dictionary of Business English will help you to understand the words on the list and learn how they are used.



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#### 4. *What kinds of things should I read apart from coursebooks?*

Past papers and other practice tests can be very useful even if you just read them as texts and don't answer the questions. And you will find lots of other useful things around you and on the internet. Some things that might be useful include:

- signs and notices
- graded readers (books that are written for people learning English)
- articles and interviews on business topics (especially those written for people studying English)
- company information on websites or in leaflets.

The Reading and Writing paper tests reading in different ways, so prepare yourself for this. For example:

- try to read a text quickly to get the main idea (this is called 'skimming')
- read a text quickly to find out certain information, for example, to find the name of a company's director (this is called 'scanning')
- read texts carefully to try to understand everything.

You will need to read in all these different ways in the test, so if you can practise like this it will really help you.

Another very useful thing you can do when you are reading is try to guess the meaning of words you don't know.







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### 5. How can I best prepare for the Writing tasks?

Reading as much as possible will help you prepare for the Writing tasks too. In addition it can help to practise writing under exam time conditions.

Secondly, make sure you know the assessment criteria – *Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language*. See below for more about how Writing is assessed.

Practise Writing tasks from past papers using the right number of words so that you have a good idea of what that amount of text looks like.

Look at sample answers in coursebooks or practice test books to see what is expected. This will help you to see what a 'good' answer looks like.

### 6. How will my writing be assessed?

Your writing will be marked using these criteria: *Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language*.

- **Content** focuses on how well you have done the task, in other words if you have done what you were asked to do.
- **Communicative Achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the particular task (for example, is the style right for an email to a colleague?) and whether you have used the right conventions.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way you put together the piece of writing, in other words if it is logical and ordered.
- **Language** focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language used and whether you've used it accurately.

### 7. How can I improve my listening skills?

Make sure you get lots of practice in understanding letters and numbers in English, as this will help in the tasks where you need to complete notes.

Listen to people speaking English as much as you can. Internet podcasts are very useful and there are many business-related videos on YouTube, for example.

Listening to parts of business programmes on English-speaking TV channels and radio stations will also give you useful practice. Don't worry if you do not understand everything – it will get easier with practice.

### 8. What is the best way to develop my speaking skills?

Take every opportunity to speak English. Practise doing past exam tasks on your own or with a friend. But don't try to learn speeches by heart. If you did this it would not help you as you would not sound natural.

You will also learn useful language if you look back at the transcripts of texts you've heard. These can be found in 'with key' editions of coursebooks and exam practice tests. Make a note of useful words and phrases that you think you could use yourself.

It's also a good idea to record yourself speaking – this can help you think about your pronunciation.

### 9. How will my speaking be assessed?

In the Speaking exam, there are two examiners. The interlocutor, who speaks to you, gives you a mark for *Global Achievement*. The assessor, who just listens, uses these assessment criteria: *Grammar and Vocabulary*, *Discourse Management*, *Pronunciation* and *Interactive Communication*. *Discourse Management* is to do with the extent of your answers, how well you organise your ideas and the relevance of your responses. *Interactive communication* is about how well you interact and respond to the other student and the interlocutor when you speak.



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How much do you know about practical things to do before the exam?

### Can you answer these questions?

1. *How can I find practice tests?*
2. *How do I register for the exam?*
3. *Can I take one paper later than the others if I don't feel ready for it?*
4. *What is the Notice to Candidates?*
5. *What do I need to take with me on exam day?*
6. *How do I register for results online?*

Find the answers on the next page

## ANSWERS

### Practical things to do before the exam

#### 1. *How can I find practice tests?*

Official books of practice tests are **available online** or from bookshops. There is also a **free sample online test**.

#### 2. *How do I register for the exam?*

If you are already at a school that offers a course in the exam, they will do this for you. If you are registering independently, click **here** and find a centre that offers *Cambridge English: Business Preliminary*. You can register directly with them, and they will be able to give you advice about preparation, give you exam dates and tell you how much it will cost.

#### 3. *Can I take one paper later than the others if I don't feel ready for it?*

No, all papers must be taken in a single session. The Speaking test is often taken on a different day from the other papers.

#### 4. *What is the Notice to Candidates?*

It's a list of things you can and can't do in the exam room. Your exam centre will give you a copy, but you can also see a copy online **here**.

#### 5. *What do I need to take with me on exam day?*

You must bring identification, for example your passport or national ID card. A bottle of water is a good idea. You can take pens and pencils, but your centre will also provide these.

#### 6. *How do I register for results online?*

When you register for the exam, you will receive a Confirmation of Entry. This will show the web address for our Results Online site, as well as your candidate ID number and secret number, which you will need to use to register to receive your results online. It is a good idea to register for results online a few weeks before your exam.



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## Exam day

It's natural to feel nervous on the day of an exam. It will help if you know exactly what to expect on the day. Doing practice tests and getting used to filling in the answer sheet is an important part of this. You can practise this on the **online sample test**.

You should expect a photograph to be taken of you at the centre. You may also be given a sheet of candidate data to fill in. (Don't worry about this - it's just to help keep accurate records on the ages and nationalities of our exam candidates.) If you are entering the exam independently you can ask your local centre about any practical questions you have. You can find your local centre **here**

Before you take your exam, be sure to visit the **What to expect on exam day** web page and read the **Summary Regulations for Candidates**.



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## EXAM DAY TIPS

- ✓ Have a good night's sleep before the exam - you will need a lot of concentration to do your best.
- ✓ You can do the tasks on the Reading and Writing paper in any order you wish. You may want to do the tasks you find easiest first and then go back to do the harder tasks.
- ✓ With Writing make sure you do exactly what you are asked to do.
- ✓ With Listening, don't panic if you miss something - you will hear each text a second time. Make sure you use the given time to read the rubric and questions in advance. This is vital as it will help you to follow the recordings much more easily.
- ✓ With Speaking, be sure to listen to the other candidate's comments, and respond to what they say. Communicating is about listening as well as speaking.





## After the exam – How much do you know about results and next steps?

What should you do after the exam?

### Can you answer these questions?

1. *What can I do with my Cambridge English: Business Preliminary qualification?*
2. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*
3. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*
4. *What exactly is the online Results Verification Service?*
5. *What will I get if I pass the exam?*
6. *What will I get if I don't quite pass the exam?*
7. *How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: Business Preliminary?*

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## ANSWERS

### Results and next steps

#### 1. *What can I do with my Cambridge English: Business Preliminary qualification?*

Cambridge English exams are recognised by over 15,000 organisations, including Coca Cola, IBM and Kodak. Cambridge English exams are also highly respected internationally. A *Cambridge English: Business Preliminary* certificate can help to open doors for you in both your studies and your work. *Cambridge English: Business Certificates* are also accepted by the UK Home Office for **visa applications**. Find out more about who accepts Cambridge English exams [here](#).

#### 2. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*

You will see your grade, the marks required to get each grade, and then your own 'candidate profile'. This shows your performance in each paper as 'Exceptional', 'Good', 'Borderline' or 'Weak'. You do not pass or fail individual papers – you will receive an overall grade based on all papers.

#### 3. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*

Statements of Results are released online four to seven weeks after the test for paper-based exams, and two weeks after computer-based exams. To see your results online, you will need your candidate ID number and secret number. These can be found on the Confirmation of Entry sheet which your centre will give you. Successful candidates receive a certificate within three months of the exam, or six weeks for computer-based exams. If you need to check when you will receive your certificate, contact your centre.

#### 4. *What exactly is the online Results Verification Service?*

This service simply makes it possible for universities, colleges or employers to see and check exam results. You will need to give them your candidate ID number and secret number.



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### 5. What will I get if I pass the exam?

If you get grade B or C in the exam, you will receive the *Business English Certificate Preliminary* at Level B1. If your performance is excellent, you will receive the *Business English Certificate Preliminary* at Level B2.

### 6. What will I get if I don't quite pass the exam?

In this case we will recognise your achievement with a Cambridge English certificate stating that you demonstrated ability at Level A2.

### 7. How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: Business Preliminary?

You could try the second of the *Cambridge English: Business Certificates*. This is called *Cambridge English: Business Vantage* and it is at Level B2 of the **Common European Framework of Reference**.

If you are interested in a General English exam, then *Cambridge English: First* is another option, as it is also at Level B2 on the CEFR.



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