



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

# Pretesting

Practise with a pretest





## What is pretesting?

Testing materials before they are used in exams allows us to make certain our exams are accurate and fair. As part of our commitment to quality and fairness, we subject all the materials in our exams to a number of procedures to ensure they are accurate and reliable. One of these quality procedures is pretesting.

## How can they help teachers and learners?

Pretests give learners a chance to practise taking Cambridge English exams using genuine English questions under exam conditions.

After taking the Reading, Listening and Use of English papers, the pretesting candidates are given scores. Writing papers are marked by trained Cambridge English Language Assessment examiners and candidates receive detailed feedback about how they performed in the Writing test, except for *IELTS* candidates who receive Band scores.

This helps learners to know which areas they need most practice in, and gives them experience and confidence in taking tests. For teachers, it helps highlight areas where their learners might need more help.





## How do they help Cambridge English Language Assessment?

Pretests are an essential part of the exam production process. Statistical data is obtained for each task, which allows us to construct our exams to a prescribed level of difficulty. This ensures, for example, that a *Cambridge English: First* Reading paper produced for a June session is at the same level of difficulty as the paper produced for a December session.

## When can pretests be taken?

Exams with fixed dates (such as *Cambridge English: Preliminary*, *Cambridge English: Key* and *Cambridge English: First*) usually have a pretest window of about three weeks. Exams which are 'on demand' (such as *IELTS*) usually have an open pretest date. The pretesting calendar gives the pretest dates available for this year as well as information about the length of the pretest.

It is advised that students take pretests six to eight weeks before their live exam. This helps to identify the candidates' current English language level and assists in their preparation for the live exam. It also means that teachers will get the scores back in time to focus on any particular language areas in need of improvement.

## What else should I know?

1. All test paper and despatch costs are paid by Cambridge English Language Assessment.
2. Pretest papers are marked in Cambridge, and scores are returned to schools within three weeks. Writing papers are sent to examiners for comments on individual candidates, so these scores and reports may take up to four weeks.
3. Pretest administration simulates the real exam, so that students not only experience the kind of questions they will face in their live exam, but also complete the answer sheets in a 'test-like' environment. We ask for your help in ensuring that as far as possible students take the pretests under exam conditions.
4. Students (except for *IELTS*) are asked to take a short anchor test (15–20 minutes) with each pretest administration to help us determine the difficulty of the pretest.
5. After the pretest, all materials must be sent back to Cambridge English Language Assessment. Materials are strictly confidential and cannot be kept for classroom practice.
6. The number of pretests available is limited, particularly for Writing, and while we will try to supply the number of papers you request, we cannot guarantee this. To ensure the fairness of the sample, we also restrict the proportion of students for each pretest from each first language.
7. Please note that pretests are not available for Speaking papers.



## How can we become involved?

To take part in pretesting, your school must either be an active Cambridge English Language Assessment examination centre or have candidates who are preparing for Cambridge English exams. You can apply to become a pretesting centre by completing the Pretesting Institution Approval form on our website: [www.cambridgeenglish.org/apply-pretesting](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/apply-pretesting)

## Some recent comments from centres who have taken part in pretesting

*"Our students really value the feedback received from pretesting as it gives them the confidence while taking the Cambridge English: First exam."*

*"This is an excellent service you provide for learners and is highly appreciated."*

*"Previous feedback has reinforced teachers' own assessment of candidates' strengths and weaknesses, who then focus on improving those areas."*

*"The feedback on the Writing papers for Cambridge English: First and Cambridge English: Advanced was particularly useful."*

*"Easy and clear instructions made the administration organised and well done."*

## How can I find out more?

You can find more information about the purpose and practice of pretesting from our website at [www.cambridgeenglish.org/why-pretesting](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/why-pretesting)

Live centres and approved pretest institutions can request pretests online.

For more information on 'pretesting windows', as well as information about the length of pretests, see the pretesting calendar.

[www.cambridgeenglish.org/pretesting-calendar](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/pretesting-calendar)

If you have any further questions about participation in pretesting, please contact us:

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