

Cambridge proficiency test



CPE (The Certificate of Proficiency in English) is considered to be the Cambridge ESOL exam of the highest level. The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages usually refers to it as an advance general English exam, at level C2. The certificate, candidates get after passing the tests successfully, acknowledges that he/she has the level of command of English language that is needed to fulfil the requirements of occupation, or employment advancement, which requires the defined level of language proficiency.

The Certificate of Proficiency in English is required for those, who want to study abroad, and for people, who work in engineering, medicine, business etc. Those, who want to pass the CPE should be able to function at the level of the educated native-speaker in an English-speaking environment, thus the test is not based on the content of any language courses the candidates may have taken in the past. The Certificate of Proficiency examination is designed to measure the candidate's writing skills (his ability to produce coherent narrative, descriptive and discursive essays), his reading and comprehension skills (reading texts on various topics and summarising them), and listening skills.

There are four ideas the syllabus of Cambridge Certificated of Proficiency in English Examination is based on:

- cultural bias should be avoided, and the status of English as an international language should be confirmed;
- using communicative approach working with EFL students;
- using authentic texts from the candidate's professional spheres and range of personal experience for reading and listening texts;
- increasing the importance of listening and speaking skills in the EFL classroom.

In 1986 and 1987 there were five papers in the Cambridge Certificated of Proficiency in English Examination:

a). Reading Comprehension, which consisted of two sections. Section A had twenty five multiple choice questions, where the blanks had to be filled with one word or phrase, chosen from the four variants offered. Section B of the Reading Comprehension consisted of fifteen multiple-choice questions based on two or more different texts.

b). Composition - the candidate had to choose two topics from the five offered. The topics were narrative, discursive and descriptive essays, an essay that was based on optional reading of books, and a directed writing exercise, based on a picture.

c). Use of English - This section was designed to test the candidate's knowledge of English grammar. It consisted of gap filling exercise, choosing a word or sentence to fill the blanks with one sentence or one word in a set of six different sentences, finishing the sentence for it to mean exactly the same, as the sentence printed before, or finishing it to be similar as much as possible, using the given word or phrase.

d). Listening Comprehension - the four passages from English interviews, broadcasting, phone conversations etc were played twice, and the candidates had to answer a set of question based on that passages.

e). Interview - the candidates had to take part in the conversation. The conversation was based on the books, prescribed for reading, describing the photograph etc.

The Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English Examination is indeed not based on the content of any language courses, nevertheless, the content of the examination often influences the structure of many EFL courses. The specialist from the Cambridge University emphasize that if section are is given too much attention, the back wash effect may be harmful. They note that: “ Multiple-choice questions have more value as a testing device than a teaching method, and excessive practice in doing this type of tests is unlikely to improve students’ ability to read English more effectively” (1990).

They advice to use Section A just to make the students accustomed with the test’s requirements and its tempo, and note, that time in the classroom should better be used for improving the students’ reading skills instead of training them to answer reading comprehension questions. British universities, and other educational facilities in some English-speaking countries recognize CPE for their matriculation purposes, as it is considered to be the indicator of the advanced level of command of English. Professional bodies and institutions of higher education also recognize CPE.

The results of the examination are sent to the Cambridge ESOL for grading and marking. The standards for passing The Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English Examination are: Grade A (Very good), Grade B (Good), Grade C (Pass). The candidates that achieve these grades are given the CPE. People, who get D of E, are seen as the ones, who were unable to reach the required standards. Once the CPE is given it is valid for the whole life.