How to teach for exams

Cambridge exams

What teachers need to know

- How long is the exam?
- What skills are tested in the exams?
- What sorts of questions or tasks are used to test each skills?
- How many different parts are there to the exam?
- How much time is allowed for each part?
- What are assessment criteria for each question or task type?
- How is the exam marked?
- How are the results presented?

YLE

	Overall length	Number of tasks	Number of items
Starters			
Listening	20 mins	4	20
Reading and writing	20 mins	5	25
Speaking	3-5 mins	4	-
Total	45mins		
Movers			
Listening	25 mins	5	25
Reading and writing	35mins	6	35
Speaking	5-7 mins	4	-
Total	1 hour 2 mins		
Flyers			
Listening	25 mins	5	25
Reading and writing	40 mins	7	44
Speaking	7-9 mins	4	-
Total	1 hour 14 mins		

Cambridge English: KEY

- Reading and Writing: 1hour 10mins. (9parts)
- Task type: Matching, 3-option multiple choice,3-option multiple-choice cloze, spelling, open cloze, information transfer, guided writing.
- Listening: about 30mins(including 8 minutes to transfer answers)
- Task type: 3-option multiple choice, matching, gap-fill
- Speaking : 8-10 mins (two parts)
- Task type: Interlocutor asks questions to each candidate in turn, information exchange.
- Certificate: A2

Cambridge English: Preliminary

- Reading and Writing: 1 hour 30 mins (5 parts)
- Task type: 3-option multiple choice, matching, True/false, 4-option multiple choice
- Writing tasks: (3 parts)
- Sentence transformations, short communicative message: postcard, email, note, choice between an informal letter or a story

Cambridge English: Preliminary

- Listening: 30mins (plus 6 minutes to transfer answers) (4 parts)
- Task type: 3-option multiple choice, gap-fill, Correct/incorrect
- Speaking: 10-12 mins (4 parts)
- Task type: Interlocuter asks questions to each candidate in turn, discussion task with visual stimulus, extended turn, general conversation
- Certificate: B1

Cambridge English: FIRST

- Reading and use of English: 1hour 15 mins (7 parts)
- Task type: multiple-choice cloze, open cloze, word formation, key word transformation, multiple choice, gapped text, multiple matching
- Writing: 1hour 20 mins (2 parts)
- Task type: question1: an essay(140-190 words). Questions 2-4 (an article, an informal letter or email, a formal email or letter, a report, a review (140-190words)

Cambridge English: FIRST

- Listening: approximately 40 minutes (4 parts)
- Task type: multiple choice, sentence completion, multiple matching
- Speaking: 14minutes (4parts)
- Task type: a conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate, an individual long-turn for each candidate, a two- way conversation between the candidates, a discussion.
- Certificate: B2

Cambridge English: Advanced

- Reading and use of English: 1hour 30mins (8 parts)
- Task type: Multiple-choice cloze, open cloze, word formation, key word transformation, multiple choice, cross-text multiple matching, gapped text, multiple matching.
- Writing: 1 hour 30 mins (2 parts)
- Task type: part 1- an essay with a discursive focus (220-260 words),part 2- a letter/email ,proposal , report , review (220-260 words)

Cambridge English: Advanced

- Listening: approximately 40 minutes (4 parts)
- Task type: multiple choice, sentence completion, multiple matching.
- Speaking: 15 minutes (4 parts)
- Task type: short exchanges with the interlocutor and with the other candidate, a 1-minute individual long turn, collaborative task involving the two candidates, a discussion.
- Certificate: C1

Why do we teach spoken language?

The objective of teaching spoken language is the development of the ability to ***interact*** successfully in that language.

Interaction involves comprehension as well as production.

Why is it difficult to assess speaking skills?

Among the macro skills of language speaking, particularly in a second or foreign language, is the most difficult language skill to assess.

It happens because speaking is a ***multifaceted*** skill.

Challengers for assessors

1. One of the biggest obstacles for assessors is a tendency to notice ***mistakes*** and not to be able to identify ***positives.***
2. The second challenge is to produce ***a clear set of criteria*** against which a candidate is assessed to establish their level, and one which the assessor understands how to use.This has to be carefully designed and relevant to the style of interview and subject of the interactions

Proven quality

- Validity – are our exams an authentic test of real-life English?
- Reliability – do our exams behave consistently and fairly?
- Impact – does our assessment have a positive effect on teaching and learning?
- Practicality – does our assessment meet learners' needs within available resources?
- Quality – how we plan, deliver and check that we provide excellence in all of these fields?

Choosing topics: Cambridge Practice

Topics are

- appropriate for the level of candidates from all cultures and experiences;
- free from any bias;
- not potentially distressing;
- likely to appeal to a broad base of candidates;
- able to provide a broad range of sub-topics;
- at an appropriate cognitive level;
- familiar, yet not too familiar;
- not specialised or technical.

Cognitive skills for B1 and B2 level exams

B1	•Referring to present, past, future •Suggesting •Agreeing/disagreeing •Giving cause/reason/example
B2	•Comparing and contrasting •Giving an opinion •Negotiating •Speculating •Decision-making •Expressing modality

Overall general ability for B1 and B2 levels (CEFR)

B1	B2
Can express opinions on abstract/cultural matters in a limited way or offer advice within a known area, and understand instructions and public announcements.	Can follow or give a talk on a familiar topic or keep up a conversation on a fairly wide range of topics.

Self-assessment grid for Speaking (CEFR)

B1	B2
I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.

Three main formats for testing speaking skills

1. ***Interview***

   Problem: the relationship between the tester and the candidate blocks candidate's initiative.

2. ***Interaction with peers***

   Problem: the performance of one candidate is likely to be affected by that of the others.

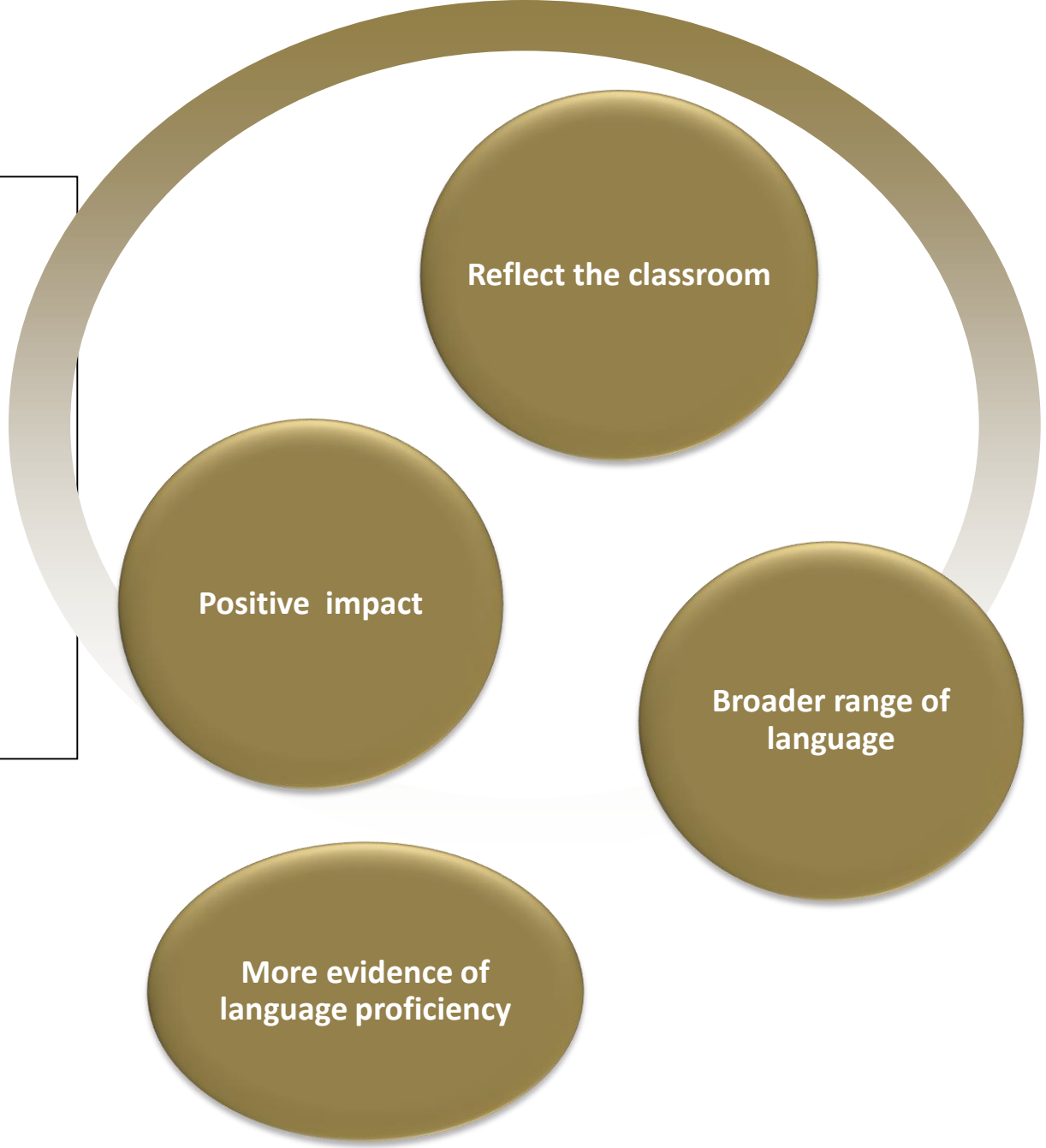
3. ***Response to recordings***

   Problem: inflexibility: there is no way of following up candidates' responses.

Interaction patterns in B1 and B2 level tests

Exam	Task	Interaction
B1	Q&A based on the frame Imaginary sit-n with prompts Describe photo Conversation on photo topic	I-C C-C C C-C
B2	Q&A based on the frame Compare photos, comment Decision making task Three-way discussion	I-C C C-C I-C-C

Positive effects of paired tests



Interaction in paired formats

- Wider range of language functions
- More complex cognitive processes
- Richer range of language
- Better inferences about a learner's proficiency in wider real-life contexts

Speaking assessment

At both levels (B1 and B2)

- candidates are assessed independently according to specific criteria;
- There are 2 examiners:
  - Assessor focuses on detailed criteria
  - Interlocutor focuses on overall effectiveness in dealing with the tasks

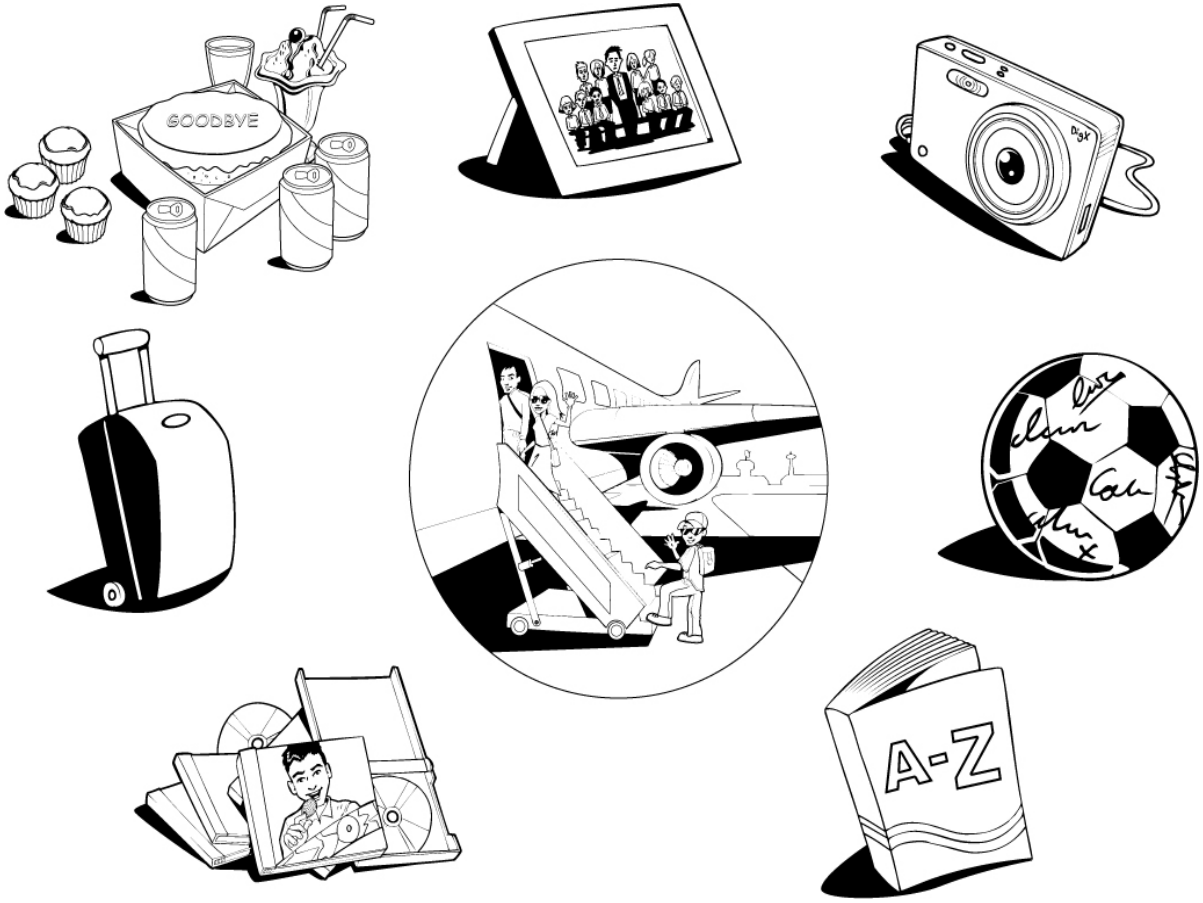
Preliminary speaking format (B1)

Part1 2-3m	Each candidate interacts with an interlocutor.The interlocutor asks candidates standardised questions.
Part2 2-3m	Simulated situation. Candidates interact with each other. Visual stimulus is given to candidates to aid the discussion. The interlocutor sets up the activity.
Part3 3m	Extended turn. A colour photograph is given to each candidate in turn and they are asked to talk about it for a minute
Part 4	General conversation. Candidates interact with each other. The topic of the conversation develops the theme in part 3.

Skills in a Speaking Exam (B1)

1. To give info of a factual and personal kind.
2. To respond to questions about present, past and future situations.
3. To use functional language to make and respond to suggestions, discuss alternatives, make recommendations and negotiate agreement.
4. To discuss photos and manage discourse using appropriate vocabulary in a longer turn.
5. To talk about opinions, likes/dislikes, preferences, experiences and habits in a follow-up conversation.

Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools Speaking Part 2 (B1)



Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools Speaking Part 3 (B1)

Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools Speaking Part 4 (B1)

Examiner:

Your photos showed people reading. Now I would like you to talk together about different kind of reading you did when you were younger, and the kinds you do now.

Cambridge English: First speaking format (B2)

Part1 2m	A conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate.
Part2 4m	An individual ‘long turn’ for each candidate with a brief response from the second candidate. In turn, the candidates are given a pair of photos.
Part3 4m	A two-way conversation between the candidates. The candidates are given spoken instructions with written stimuli, which are used in discussion and decision-making.
Part4 4m	A discussion on topics related to collaborative task.

Skills in a Speaking Exam (B2)

1. To give info of a factual and personal kind, responding to questions about work, leisure and future plans.
2. To deliver a short piece of extended discourse in response to visual stimuli and written prompts.
3. To carry out a collaborative peer task in response to verbal input.
4. To use social and general interactional language, exchange ideas, reach a decision through negotiation, express and justify opinions, agree/disagree, suggest, speculate and evaluate.

Cambridge English: First for Schools Speaking Part 2 (B2)

Why is the music important to the different groups of people?

1

Collaborative task

speak another foreign language

draw well

Why might students want to learn to do these skills?

play a musical instrument

cook a meal

play a sport

Cambridge Assessment Common Scale for speaking

B1	B2
•Able to handle communication in ***most*** familiar situations. •Able to construct longer utterances but is not able to use complex language except in well-rehearsed utterances.	•Able to handle communication in familiar situations. •Able to organise extended discourse but occasionally produces utterances that lack coherence and some inaccuracies and inappropriate usage occur

Cambridge Assessment Common Scale for speaking (continued)

B1	B2
•Has problems searching for language resources to express ideas and concepts resulting in pauses and hesitation. •Pronunciation generally intelligible but L1 may put a strain on the speaker. •Can use repair strategies but requires assistance by an interlocutor	•Maintains a flow of languge although hesitation may occur whilst searching for language resources. •Although pronunciation is easily understood, L1 features may be intrusive. •Doesn't require assistance or prompting.

Assessment analytic scale for B1 and B2 level exams

- Grammar and vocabulary.
- Discourse management.
- Pronunciation.
- Interactive communication.

For each aspect bands from 0 to 5 are awarded.

Discourse management

- Coherence and cohesion which are achieved with a use of cohesive devices, related vocabulary, grammatical devices and discourse markers.
- Extent: the amount of language produced by the candidate.
- Relevance: a contribution that is related to the task.
- Repetition.

Pronunciation

- Intelligibility: easiness with which a speaker is understood by a non-language specialist.
- Phonological feature:

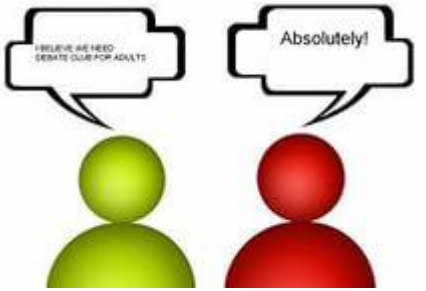
-individual sounds;

-stress;

-intonation;

-rhythm.

Interaction



The ability to

- initiate, maintain and close conversation;
- support a speaking partner;
- take and relinquish a turn;
- initiate and respond appropriately;
- link contributions to those of other speakers;
- negotiate towards the outcome;

Global achievement scale (B1 level)

5	Handles communication on familiar topics despite some hesitation. Organises extended discourse but occasionally produces utterances that lack coherence, and some inaccuracies and inappropriate usage occur.
4	Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5
3	Handles communication in everyday situations despite some hesitation. Constructs longer utterances but is not able to use complex language except in well rehearsed utterances.
2	Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3
1	Conveys basic meaning in very familiar everyday situations. Produces utterances which tend to be very short – words or phrases- with frequent hesitation and pauses
0	Performance below band 1

Global achievement scale (B2 level)

5	Handles communication on a range of familiar topics, with very little hesitation. Uses accurate and appropriate linguistic resources to express ideas and produce extended discourse that is generally coherent.
4	Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5
3	Handles communication on familiar topics,despite some hesitation. Organises extended discourse but occasionally produces utterances that lack coherence, and some inaccuracies and inappropriate usage occur.
2	Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3
1	Handles communication in everyday situations despite some hesitation. Constructs longer utterances but is not able to use complex language except in well rehearsed utterances.
	Performance below band 1

Listening B1

Part	Number of questions	Number of marks	Task type	What do candidate have to do?
1	7	7	3-option multiple choice	Identify key information in seven short monologues or dialogues and choose the correct visual
2	6	6	3-option multiple choice	Listen to a monologue or interview for specific information and detailed meaning
3	6	6	Gap-fill	Listen to a monologue and complete gaps in a page of notes
4	6	6	Correct/incorrect	Listen to an informal dialogue for detailed meaning and to identify attitudes and opinions

Part	Number of questions	Number of marks	Task type	What do candidates have to do?
1	8	8	Multiple choice. The focus is on genre, identifying speaker feeling, attitude, topic, opinion, purpose, agreement between speakers, gist and detail.	A series of short unrelated extracts, of approximately 30 seconds each, from monologues or exchanges between interacting speakers. There is one-multiple choice question per text, each with three option
2	10	10	Sentence completion. The focus is on detailed, indentifying specific information and stated opinion.	A monologue lasting 3-4 minutes. Candidates are required to complete the sentences with information heard on the recoding.
3	5	5	Multiple – matching.	5 short related monologues of 30 seconds each. There are five questions which require the selection of the correct option from a list 8.
4	7	7	Multiple-choice. The focus is on identifying opinion, attitude, detail, gist, main idea and specific information.	An interview or exchange between two speakers and lasting 3-4 minutes. There are seven 3-option multiple-choice questions.