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PREFACE

This handbook is intended principally for teachers and course designers who are, or intend to become, involved in preparing candidates for the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET). There are separate handbooks for other Cambridge ESOL examinations.

The introductory part of the handbook provides a general background to the Cambridge ESOL examinations and an overview of the work of Cambridge ESOL, including a description of current procedures for test design, production and marking. It is hoped that this will be of interest both to those who are familiar with the Cambridge ESOL examinations, and to those who are coming to them for the first time.

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE ESOL EXAMINATIONS

Introduction to Cambridge ESOL

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) is a part of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), which has provided examinations in English for speakers of other languages since 1913. Cambridge ESOL offers an extensive range of examinations, certificates and diplomas for learners and teachers of English. In 2002 over 1.2 million people took these examinations at centres in over 130 countries.

Cambridge ESOL was formerly known as UCLES EFL. The title ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages – was adopted in October 2002, reflecting the increasing diversity of the candidature.

Cambridge ESOL examinations can be taken by anyone whose first language is not English. They are suitable for learners of all nationalities, whatever their first language and cultural background, and there are examinations suitable for learners of almost any age. The range of Cambridge ESOL

examinations includes specialist examinations in Business English and English for Academic Purposes, as well as tests for young learners and a suite of certificates and diplomas for language teachers.

The examinations cover all four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. They include a range of tasks which assess candidates' ability to use English, so that in preparing for the examinations, candidates develop the skills they need to make practical use of the language in a variety of contexts. Above all, what the Cambridge ESOL examinations assess is the ability to communicate effectively in English.

Cambridge ESOL is committed to providing examinations of the highest possible quality. This commitment is underpinned by an extensive programme of research and evaluation, and by continuous monitoring of the marking and grading of all Cambridge ESOL examinations. Of particular importance is the rigorous set of procedures which are used in the production and pretesting of question papers, and these are described in the following section.

The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)

Cambridge ESOL is a member of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), which was formed in 1990. The members are all providers of language examinations and certificates from countries within Europe.

The principal objectives of ALTE are as follows:

- to promote the transnational recognition of certification, especially in Europe
- to establish common standards for all stages of the language testing process, i.e. test development, question and materials writing, test administration, marking and grading, reporting of test results, test analysis and reporting of findings
- to collaborate on joint projects and in the exchange of ideas and know-how.

Cambridge ESOL examinations fulfil the Code of Practice established by ALTE. This Code of Practice focuses on the responsibilities of both examination providers and examination users and covers four main areas:

- developing examinations
- interpreting examination results
- striving for fairness
- informing examination takers.

For more information on ALTE please visit www.ALTE.org

Key features of Cambridge ESOL Examinations

Cambridge ESOL undertakes:

- to assess language skills at a range of levels, each of them having a clearly defined relevance to the needs of language learners;
- to assess skills which are directly relevant to the range of uses for which learners will need the language they have learnt, and which cover the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – as well as knowledge of language structure and use;
- to provide accurate and consistent assessment of each language skill at the appropriate level;
- to relate the examinations to the teaching curriculum in such a way that they encourage positive learning experiences and to seek to achieve a positive impact wherever possible;
- to endeavour to be fair to all candidates, whatever their national, ethnic and linguistic background, gender or disability.

Cambridge ESOL examinations are designed around four essential qualities: validity, reliability, impact and practicality. Validity is normally taken to be the extent to which a test can be shown to produce scores which are an accurate reflection of the candidate's true level of language skills. Reliability concerns the extent to which test results are stable, consistent and accurate, and therefore the extent to which they can be depended on for making decisions about the candidate. Impact concerns the effects, beneficial or otherwise, which an examination has on the candidates and other users, whether these are educational, social, economic or political, or various combinations of these. Practicality can be defined as the extent to which an examination is practicable in terms of the resources needed to produce and administer it. All these factors underpin the development and production of Cambridge ESOL examinations, and have been taken into consideration in developing the updated PET examination in 2004.

The Production of Cambridge ESOL Question Papers

The production process for question papers for Cambridge ESOL examinations begins with the commissioning of material and ends with the printing of question papers.

For the majority of Cambridge ESOL question papers there are five main stages in the production process:

- commissioning
- editing
- pretesting
- analysis and banking of material
- question paper construction.

This process is represented in the diagram on the right.

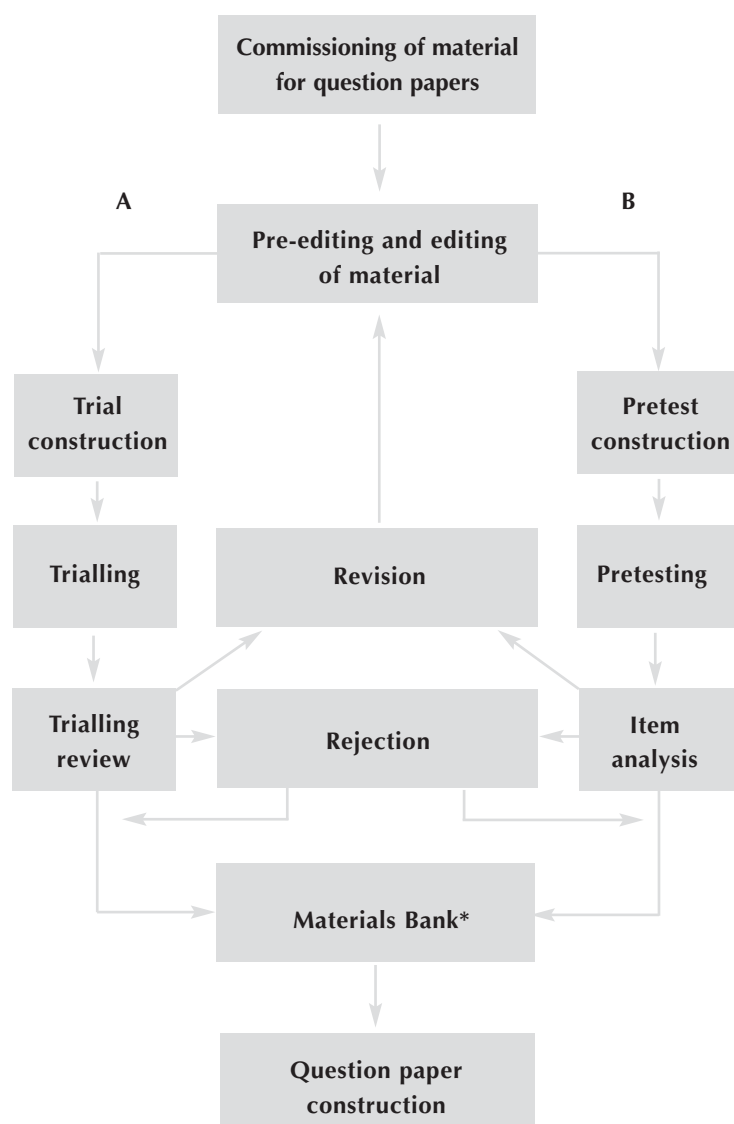
Cambridge ESOL employs teams of item writers to produce

examination material, and throughout the writing and editing process strict guidelines are followed in order to ensure that the materials conform to the test specifications. Topics or contexts of language use which might introduce a bias against any group of candidates of a particular background (i.e. on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, etc.) are avoided.

After selection and editing, the items are compiled into pretest papers. Pretesting plays a central role as it allows for questions and materials with known measurement characteristics to be banked so that new versions of question papers can be produced as and when required. The pretesting process helps to ensure that all versions conform to the test requirements in terms of content and level of difficulty.

Each pretest paper is supplied to candidates with an additional anchor test. The anchor items are carefully chosen on the basis of their known measurement characteristics, and their inclusion means that all new items can be linked to a common scale of difficulty.

Pretest papers are despatched to a wide variety of schools and colleges which have offered to administer the pretests to



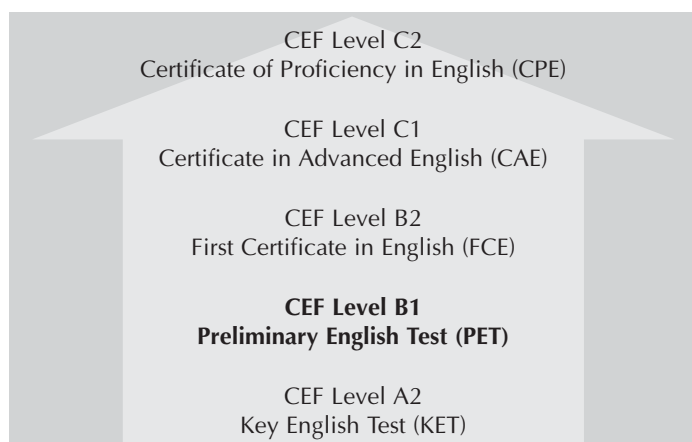
*electronic bank for pretested materials

candidates of a suitable level. After the completed pretests have been returned to the Pretesting Section at Cambridge ESOL, a score for each student is provided to the centre within two weeks of receiving the completed scripts. The items are marked and analysed, and those which are found to be suitable are banked.

Material for the productive components of the examinations is trialled with candidates to assess its suitability for inclusion in the Materials Bank.

The Cambridge ESOL Main Suite: a Five-Level System

Cambridge ESOL has developed a series of examinations with similar characteristics, spanning five levels and linked to the levels of the Common European Framework (CEF) established by the Council of Europe. Within the series of five levels the Preliminary English Test (PET) is at CEF Level B1.



PRELIMINARY ENGLISH TEST (PET)

Background

PET was introduced in the late 1970s and tests competence in Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. The language level of PET is approximately two thirds of the way towards that of the First Certificate in English. PET is based on the Council of Europe Threshold Level (1990) by van Ek and Trim.

In 1999, a review of PET was undertaken involving key clients and stakeholders. The result of this review is the updated PET, applicable from March 2004.

The Level of PET

PET is at level B1 of the Common European Framework, and a description of this level is given below in terms of:

- what material learners can handle;
- what learners can be expected to be able to do.

At this level a learner should be able to cope linguistically in a range of everyday situations which require a largely predictable use of language. A Threshold Level user will be

able to use English in their own or a foreign country in contact with native and non-native speakers of English for general purposes as described below.

Materials a Threshold User can deal with

The text types which can be handled by the learner at this level include street signs and public notices, product packaging, forms, posters, brochures, city guides and instructions on how to do things, as well as informal letters and newspaper and magazine texts such as articles, features and weather forecasts. The kinds of listening texts the learner needs to understand are announcements made at railway stations and airports, traffic information given on the radio, public announcements made at sporting events or pop concerts and instructions given by police or customs officials. At this level, candidates need to be able to not only pick out facts, but also to understand opinions, attitudes, moods and wishes.

What a Threshold User can do

Learners at this level, if travelling as tourists, can get all the information needed from a tourist information centre, as long as it is of a straightforward, non-specialised nature. Similarly, if taking part in a guided tour, they can understand the main points of a commentary and ask questions in order to get more information, as long as no specialised technical language is needed. They can deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through a travel agent or when actually travelling. In the context of work they can state requirements within their own job area, and ask questions of a fact-finding nature. In a meeting, they can take part in a discussion which involves the exchange of factual information or receiving instructions, but they may have difficulty dealing with anything unpredictable or unfamiliar.

Where telephone calls are concerned, predictability is also important at this level, and as long as only routine matters are involved, the learner can receive and pass on messages. They can write simple personal letters such as 'thank-you' letters, but only within a more or less standard format.

Several of the examinations provided by members of ALTE at this level are used as measures of language ability for official or institutional purposes, such as acquiring citizenship or entry to courses of study.

PET Candidature

In 2002, there were over 96,000 candidates for PET. Information is collected about the PET candidature at each session, when candidates fill in Candidate Information Sheets. These provide essential information, which is needed, for example, to see whether certain types of question cause difficulties for candidates in particular age ranges or from particular language backgrounds. The information provided is treated as confidential and is covered by the Data Protection

Act of the United Kingdom. The answers that a candidate gives to the questions on the Candidate Information Sheet will not affect his/her result in any way.

Nationality

PET is taken in over eighty different countries, with the majority of candidates coming from Europe and South America.

Age

About 70% of PET candidates are aged 20 or under. A further 20% are in the 21–30 age group.

Gender

Approximately 60% are female.

Employment

Most candidates are studying full-time.

Exam Preparation

Approximately 80% of the candidature attend preparation classes. On average, they study English for about four and a half years in total prior to entry.

Reasons for taking PET

Candidates enter for a variety of reasons. About 55% of candidates indicate that they are taking PET for personal interest reasons, while nearly 50% state that they are taking PET to improve their future employment prospects. Nearly 30% of candidates also indicate that they are interested in further study of English.

What sort of test is PET?

In real life, language is used in context, and the forms of language vary according to that context. The assessment aims of PET and its syllabus are designed to ensure that the test reflects the use of language in real life. The question types and formats have been devised with the purpose of fulfilling these aims. PET corresponds closely to an active and communicative approach to learning English, without neglecting the need for clarity and accuracy.

Marking and Grading

The final mark a candidate receives in PET is an aggregate of the marks obtained in each of the three papers (Reading/Writing, Listening and Speaking). There is no minimum pass mark for individual papers.

PET has two passing grades:

- Pass with Merit
- Pass

and two failing grades:

- Narrow Fail
- Fail

‘Pass’ ordinarily corresponds to approximately 70% of the total marks, and ‘Pass with Merit’ to approximately 85%. A ‘Narrow Fail’ result indicates that a candidate was within 5% of the ‘Pass’ boundary.

Statements of Results contain a graphical display of a candidate’s performance in each component. These are shown against a scale of Exceptional – Good – Borderline – Weak and indicate the candidate’s relative performance in each paper.

Administration

Candidates mark or write all their answers on OMR (Optical Mark Reader) answer sheets. For Paper 1 (Reading and Writing) there are two answer sheets, and candidates must fill in these sheets within the time allowed for the Paper as printed on the front cover of the question paper.

In Paper 2 (Listening), candidates write their answers on the question paper as they listen to the tape, and are given 6 additional minutes to transfer their answers to the answer sheet.

Samples of the OMR answer sheets for the Reading/Writing and Listening Papers are provided on pages 33, 34 and 46 of this Handbook and it is useful for candidates to practise filling these in before the date of the examination so that they are familiar with PET test procedure.

Time and Place

PET is usually available six times a year on fixed dates in March, May, June (twice), November and December.

Current information on dates and the administrative details of the examination are provided separately to centres. A copy can be obtained from your nearest Cambridge Examination Centre. A list of Cambridge Examination Centres is obtainable from Cambridge ESOL (address follows) or from the nearest office of the British Council. All PET entries must be made through an authorised centre.

Special Circumstances

Special circumstances covers three main areas: special arrangements, special consideration and malpractice.

Special arrangements

These are available for disabled candidates. They may include extra time, separate accommodation or equipment, braille transcription, etc. Consult the Cambridge ESOL Local Secretary in your area for more details.

Special consideration

Cambridge ESOL will give special consideration to candidates affected by adverse circumstances immediately before or during an examination. Special consideration can be given where an application is sent through the centre and is made within ten working days of the examination date. Examples of acceptable reasons for giving special consideration are in cases of illness or other unexpected events.

Malpractice

The Malpractice Committee will consider cases where candidates are suspected of copying/collusion or breaking the examination regulations in some other way. Results may be withheld because further investigation is needed or because of infringement of regulations. Centres are notified if a candidate's results have been investigated.

PET Support

Course materials

A list of UK publishers which produce coursebooks and practice materials related to the examinations is available from Cambridge ESOL and is on the Cambridge ESOL website. PET requires an all-round language ability and this should be borne in mind when selecting course materials.

Most coursebooks will be supplemented; care should be taken to ensure that coursebooks and practice materials selected accurately reflect the content and format of the examination.

N.B. Cambridge ESOL does not undertake to advise on textbooks or courses of study.

Past Papers and Examination Reports

Cambridge ESOL produces past examination papers, which can be used for practice, and examination reports, which provide a general view of how candidates performed overall and on each paper and offer guidance on the preparation of candidates. Details of how to order past papers and examination reports, and how to download an order form, are available from www.CambridgeESOL.org

Seminars for Teachers

Cambridge ESOL offers a wide range of seminars designed for teachers concerned with the examinations; some are also suitable as introductions for administrators, school directors etc. Some seminars are intended to provide information and support for teachers who are familiar with the examinations, and others can be used to introduce teachers to established examinations and also to new or revised examinations. Contact Cambridge ESOL for further details.

PET CONTENT: AN OVERVIEW

Paper	Name	Timing	Content	Test Focus
Paper 1	Reading/ Writing	1 hour 30 minutes	Reading: Five parts which test a range of reading skills with a variety of texts, ranging from very short notices to longer continuous texts. Writing: Three parts which test a range of writing skills.	Assessment of candidates' ability to understand the meaning of written English at word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and whole text level. Assessment of candidates' ability to produce straightforward written English, ranging from producing variations on simple sentences to pieces of continuous text.
Paper 2	Listening	30 minutes (approx.)	Four parts ranging from short exchanges to longer dialogues and monologues.	Assessment of candidates' ability to understand dialogues and monologues in both informal and neutral settings on a range of everyday topics.
Paper 3	Speaking	10–12 minutes per pair of candidates	Four parts: In Part 1, candidates interact with an examiner; In Parts 2 and 4 they interact with another candidate; In Part 3, they have an extended individual long turn.	Assessment of candidates' ability to express themselves in order to carry out functions at <i>Threshold</i> level. To ask and to understand questions and make appropriate responses. To talk freely on matters of personal interest.

Aims and Objectives

Candidates who are successful in PET should be able to communicate satisfactorily in most everyday situations with both native and non-native speakers of English. This aim corresponds to the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Threshold Specification.

Reading

Using the structures and topics listed in this Handbook, candidates should be able to understand public notices and signs; to read short texts of a factual nature and show understanding of the content; to demonstrate understanding of the structure of the language as it is used to express

notions of relative time, space, possession, etc.; to scan factual material for information in order to perform relevant tasks, disregarding redundant or irrelevant material; to read texts of an imaginative or emotional character and to appreciate the central sense of the text, the attitude of the writer to the material and the effect it is intended to have on the reader.

Writing

Students should be able to give information, report events, and describe people, objects and places as well as convey reactions to situations, express hopes, regrets, pleasure, etc. They should also be able to use the words they know appropriately and accurately in different written contexts, and be capable of producing variations on simple sentences.

Listening

Students should be able to understand and respond to public announcements; to show precise understanding of short factual utterances and to make identifications on the basis of these; to extract information of a factual nature (times, dates, etc.) from speech which will contain redundancies and language outside the defined limits of PET; to understand the sense of a dialogue and show appreciation of the attitudes and intentions of the speakers.

Speaking

Students should be able to express themselves in order to fulfil the functions listed in the Syllabus in situations which simulate authentic communication. They should be able to ask and to understand questions and make appropriate responses, and should be able to talk freely in order to express emotions, reactions, etc.

Language Specifications

Inventory of Functions, Notions and Communicative Tasks

Note that 'talking' is used below to refer to BOTH speaking and writing.

greeting people and responding to greetings (in person and on the phone)
introducing oneself and other people
asking for and giving personal details: (full) name, age, address, names of relatives and friends, occupation, etc.
understanding and completing forms giving personal details
understanding and writing letters, giving personal details
describing education, qualifications and skills
describing people (personal appearance, qualities)
asking and answering questions about personal possessions
asking for repetition and clarification
re-stating what has been said

checking on meaning and intention
helping others to express their ideas
interrupting a conversation
starting a new topic
changing the topic
resuming or continuing the topic
asking for and giving the spelling and meaning of words
counting and using numbers
asking and telling people the time, day and/or date
asking for and giving information about routines and habits
understanding and writing diaries and letters giving information about everyday activities
talking about what people are doing at the moment
talking about past events and states in the past, recent activities and completed actions
understanding and producing simple narratives
reporting what people say
talking about future or imaginary situations
talking about future plans or intentions
making predictions
identifying and describing accommodation (houses, flats, rooms, furniture, etc.)
buying and selling things (costs, measurements and amounts)
talking about food and ordering meals
talking about the weather
talking about one's health
following and giving simple instructions
understanding simple signs and notices
asking the way and giving directions
asking for and giving travel information
asking for and giving simple information about places
identifying and describing simple objects (shape, size, weight, colour, purpose or use, etc.)
making comparisons and expressing degrees of difference
talking about how to operate things
describing simple processes
expressing purpose, cause and result, and giving reasons
drawing simple conclusions and making recommendations
making and granting/refusing simple requests
making and responding to offers and suggestions
expressing and responding to thanks
giving and responding to invitations
giving advice
giving warnings and prohibitions
persuading and asking/telling people to do something
expressing obligation and lack of obligation
asking and giving/refusing permission to do something
making and responding to apologies and excuses
expressing agreement and disagreement, and contradicting people
paying compliments
criticising and complaining
sympathising
expressing preferences, likes and dislikes (especially about hobbies and leisure activities)
talking about physical and emotional feelings
expressing opinions and making choices
expressing needs and wants

expressing (in)ability in the present and in the past
talking about (im)probability and (im)possibility
expressing degrees of certainty and doubt

Inventory of Grammatical Areas

Verbs

regular and irregular forms

Modals

can (ability; requests; permission)
could (ability; possibility; polite requests)
would (polite requests)
will (offer)
shall (suggestion; offer)
should (advice)
may (possibility)
might (possibility)
have (got) to (obligation)
ought to (obligation)
must (obligation)
mustn't (prohibition)
need (necessity)
needn't (lack of necessity)
used to + infinitive (past habits)

Tenses

Present simple: states, habits, systems and processes (and verbs not used in the continuous form)
Present continuous: future plans and activities, present actions
Present perfect simple: recent past with just, indefinite past with yet, already, never, ever; unfinished past with for and since
Past simple: past events
Past continuous: parallel past actions, continuous actions interrupted by the past simple tense
Past perfect simple: narrative, reported speech
Future with going to
Future with present continuous and present simple
Future with will and shall: offers, promises, predictions, etc.

Verb Forms

Affirmative, interrogative, negative
Imperatives
Infinitives (with and without to) after verbs and adjectives
Gerunds (-ing form) after verbs and prepositions
Gerunds as subjects and objects
Passive forms: present and past simple
Verb + object + infinitive give/take/send/bring/show + direct/indirect object
Causative have/get
So/nor with auxiliaries

Compound Verb Patterns

Phrasal verbs/verbs with prepositions

Conditional Sentences

Type 0: An iron bar expands if/when you heat it.
Type 1: If you do that again, I'll leave.
Type 2: I would tell you the answer if I knew it.
If I were you, I wouldn't do that again.

Simple Reported Speech

Statements, questions and commands: say, ask, tell
He said that he felt ill.
I asked her if I could leave.
No one told me what to do.
Indirect and embedded questions: know, wonder
Do you know what he said?
I wondered what he would do next.

Interrogatives

What, What (+ noun)
Where; When
Who; Whose; Which
How; How much; How many; How often; How long; etc.
Why
(including the interrogative forms of all tenses and modals listed)

Nouns

Singular and plural (regular and irregular forms)
Countable and uncountable nouns with some and any
Abstract nouns
Compound nouns
Complex noun phrases
Genitive: 's & s'
Double genitive: a friend of theirs

Pronouns

Personal (subject, object, possessive)
Reflexive and emphatic: myself, etc.
Impersonal: it, there
Demonstrative: this, that, these, those
Quantitative: one, something, everybody, etc.
Indefinite: some, any, something, one, etc.
Relative: who, which, that, whom, whose

Determiners

a + countable nouns
the + countable/uncountable nouns

Adjectives

Colour, size, shape, quality, nationality
Predicative and attributive
Cardinal and ordinal numbers
Possessive: my, your, his, her, etc.
Demonstrative: this, that, these, those
Quantitative: some, any, many, much, a few, a lot of, all, other, every, etc.

Comparative and superlative forms (regular and irregular):

(not) as . . . as, not . . . enough to, too . . . to

Order of adjectives

Participles as adjectives

Compound adjectives

Adverbs

Regular and irregular forms

Manner: quickly, carefully, etc.

Frequency: often, never, twice a day, etc.

Definite time: now, last week, etc.

Indefinite time: already, just, yet, etc.

Degree: very, too, rather, etc.

Place: here, there, etc.

Direction: left, right, along, etc.

Sequence: first, next, etc.

Sentence adverbs: too, either, etc.

Pre-verbal, post-verbal and end-position adverbs

Comparative and superlative forms (regular and irregular)

Prepositions

Location: to, on, inside, next to, at (home), etc.

Time: at, on, in, during, etc.

Direction: to, into out of, from, etc.

Instrument: by, with

Miscellaneous: like, as, due to, owing to, etc.

Prepositional phrases: at the beginning of, by means of, etc.

Prepositions preceding nouns and adjectives: by car, for sale, at last, etc.

Prepositions following (i) nouns and adjectives: advice on, afraid of, etc. (ii) verbs: laugh at, ask for, etc.

Connectives

and, but, or, either . . . or

when, while, until, before, after, as soon as

where

because, since, as, for

so that, (in order) to

so, so . . . that, such . . . that

if, unless

although, while

Note that students will meet forms other than those listed above in PET, on which they will not be directly tested.

Topics

Clothes

Daily life

Education

Entertainment and media

Environment

Food and drink

Free time

Health, medicine and exercise

Hobbies and leisure

House and home

Language

People

Personal feelings, opinions and experiences

Personal identification

Places and buildings

Relations with other people

Transport

Services

Shopping

Social interaction

Sport

The natural world

Travel and holidays

Weather

Work and Jobs

Lexis

The PET examination includes items which normally occur in the everyday vocabulary of native-speakers using English today.

Candidates should know the lexis appropriate to their personal requirements, for example, nationalities, hobbies, likes and dislikes.

Note that the consistent use of American pronunciation, spelling and lexis is acceptable in PET.