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Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) Reading

General information

Background to the Examination

The Certificate of Proficiency in English is a general English qualification which is part of the Cambridge ESOL Main-suite examinations. Set at level C2 of the CEF, CPE recognises the ability to function effectively in almost any English-speaking context. CPE is designed for learners who have achieved a high level of language skills and are approaching a standard of English similar to that of an educated native speaker. The exam also requires an appropriate level of educational and personal maturity.

Candidature

CAE is taken by 45,000 candidates per year in 80 countries. Around 75% of CPE candidates are aged 25 or under. In some countries, where CPE is more commonly taken by candidates in their late teens, the average is lower. Around 85% of candidates attend preparation classes.

Structure of the Test

CPE tests the skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking and also has a Use of English Paper. CPE is administered in five separate papers. Paper 1 Reading, Paper 2 Writing, Paper 3 Use of English, Paper 4 Listening and Paper 5 Speaking. Each of these five papers is equally weighted at 20%. There are five possible grades in CPE: Three pass grades (A, B and C) and two fail grades (D and E). Results are based on candidates' aggregate scores across the four skills.

CPE Reading Paper

The paper has a fixed format, with four parts. Parts One and Two are made up of three or four shorter texts (125-260 words each), whilst parts three and four feature longer texts (700-1100 words). Each part aims to test a particular range of reading sub-skills through a given task type. The texts in the reading paper are drawn from a range of sources including informational texts, journalism, non-fiction books and fiction. The range of text and task types is intended to encourage a familiarity with different types of reading material as well as the use of different approaches to reading appropriate to the text type and reader purpose. Candidates at this level are expected to understand a wide range of demanding texts, and recognise implicit meaning. They are required to show understanding of gist, detail and text structure, particularly the development of ideas, opinions and attitudes, and should also be able to deduce meaning from context and have strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words and structures. Other tasks on the paper include multiple-choice questions on both shorter and longer texts which focus on aspects of tone, implication and reference as well as gist and

detailed meaning, and a four-option multiple-choice cloze test which tests knowledge of collocation, idiom, complementation and semantic precision.

Part Three

This task focuses on reading for detailed understanding and main and subsidiary ideas and tests understanding of how texts are structured as well as the ability to follow text development. The texts come from authentic sources, but may be slightly adapted to meet the needs of the task. The texts may include vocabulary which is unfamiliar to candidates, but this should not interfere with their ability to complete the task.

Reading (CEFR C2)

Test to be analysed	Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)
Target language	English
Task	Reading component (Part 3) Q's 27 – 33
Rubrics	Target language
Items	Target language
Time to do total test	1 hr 30
Target levels	CEFR C2
	ALTE 5
Age-group sector	Late teenage and adult
Domain	Public domain
Communicative activities	
Overall reading comprehension	Can read texts of various kinds for both information and general interest. Can use text structure to interpret meaning and read more efficiently.
Reading for information and argument	Can distinguish main from subsidiary points and the gist of a text from specific detail.
Text length	800 - 1100 words.

Mark Distribution

Each of the items carries two marks, representing approximately 22 % of the marks available across the four parts of the paper.

Effective Level

All CPE Reading tasks are pre-tested using volunteer candidates. Typically, pre-test candidates are students preparing to take the exam in the near future. A range of age and nation-



ality groups is represented in the pre-test population which roughly corresponds to that of the live candidature.

Pre-tested materials are then subject to statistical analysis at task and item level using both classical item analysis to establish that items are discriminating, and Rasch analysis to determine the level of difficulty. Each task, therefore, consists of items of measured difficulty, which are selected from within a specified range to determine the mean difficulty of the task.

Calibration

Tests are constructed from the calibrated tasks in the item bank. The one-parameter Rasch model is used for calibrating the items. For most routine analysis, Cambridge ESOL uses the BIGSTEPS analysis program supplemented by in-house programmes for formatting data and handling the output. The logit scale produced by BIGSTEPS is re-scaled to produce a conventional ESOL scale, which is used for test construction purposes. This is known as the common scale for item-based tests. The complete scale for Cambridge ESOL examinations, from KET (A2) to CPE (C2) covers a range from about 20 to 110. The expected range of values for CPE on this scale is approximately 70-90, with a target mean of 80.

Performance on This Task

Candidates found this task the most challenging on the paper. As it tests understanding of how texts are structured and the ability to predict text development, it may be necessary to consider large sections of the text, or even the overall organisation, in order to reconstitute a particular part of the text. Question 29 and Question 33 were two that caused difficulty. For Question 29, the key is B. The consequences' refers back to the fact that many companies have put the idea of meeting 'customers' needs into practice. And it is these consequences which have 'pleasingly increased the status of marketing people'. Some candidates chose A. Although the option A might seem to fit the beginning of gap 29, as in extract A there is a list of positive features of advertising, which looks like it would be followed by 'All these things have pleasingly increased the status of marketing people', but the list is one of aspirations, rather than achievements. Additionally, option A starts 'Thus, client companies almost everywhere took the view of one of their leaders quoted in the British trade magazine Campaign...'. This does not follow on coherently from the sentence before gap 29, which starts 'Still, it's scarcely unfair...'. For Question 33, the beginning of the key, E, mentions the difficulty that companies have in getting the help they may need to increase the proportion of successful advertising, and this increase is referred to before the gap. The end of E, which talks about secrets of success, refers forward to the possible means of accessing these secrets, the conferences and seminars, and books. Some candidates chose option C, the distracter, instead. The beginning of C gives the reason for the 'poverty of the current advertising scene', the linker 'Ultimately' implying this is a concluding or final statement. But this does not follow on well from the final sentence before the gap, which is focusing on increasing the proportion of successful advertising. The end of C talks about adopting a more empirical approach to advertising, which does not link in with the beginning of the paragraph after gap 33, which starts 'This means...' and continues with a statement concerning the relative helpfulness of conferences and seminars, and books.

This CPE task was calibrated on a candidature of 21,118.



Reading Items

Instructions to candidate

You are going to read an introduction to a book. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A-H** the one which fits each gap (27-33). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Advertising on trial

If you work for an advertising agency, the early years of the 1990s may well have been the toughest of your professional life. The recession in business was bad enough. It was longer, deeper and more severe than anticipated by even the most pessimistic, hitting industrialised nations as hard as anything else for thirty years.

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Every single business in the country was affected, some – the vehicle and building trades – finding themselves 30 per cent down. A lot of people – a lot of companies – in a lot of countries suffered. Of course, advertising people are scarcely unique in losing their jobs in such difficult times, but of all those still in employment, they often feel particularly under pressure.

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And yet, alongside these psychological and financial imperatives lies an almost paradoxical rise in the perceived importance of the marketing process. The notion that companies should be making sure they are producing services and goods that their customers want, as opposed to merely what it is convenient for them to provide, is not a new one. Still, it's scarcely unfair to say that it has been only over the past ten or fifteen years that many companies seem to have put the idea intentionally, rather than fortuitously, into practice.

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All these things have pleasingly increased the status of marketing people, while simultaneously adding to their burden. Marketing is increasingly regarded as that which it is not: a universal panacea. With approximately half of most marketing budgets being spent on advertising, there's some truth in saying that the buck then stops with the ad-people. It is certainly true that if the 80s was the decade in which advertising never had it so good, the start of the 90s saw the industry enduring its worst downturn for a generation. This was, of course, partly a direct consequence of the economic climate at the time.

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And, generally, in the absence of concrete, convincing and quantitative evidence to the contrary, they had to conclude that the benefits of advertising might be questionable. At a time when enthusiasm to account for every dollar spent was naturally high, it was simply not clear enough to many client companies exactly what they were getting for the large sums of money they were spending, exactly what return they were seeing on their investment. Advertising – ever a business to excite the suspicions of the sceptic – was, as a consequence, more than ever before on trial.

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Now, while none of this should elicit sympathy for a thoroughly tough business, it does mean that many of those advertising people still in work continue to face precisely the same problems as their clients: how to do more with less. If this is, in itself, sufficiently trying, a number of other factors have made the production of effective advertising particularly difficult.

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These include, for example, the dramatic demographic changes facing much of the West; the burgeoning power of the retailer; the changing needs and desires of consumers; the rise of sponsorship; the increasingly onerous legal restrictions on advertising. And, of course, for some companies there is the new challenge of advertising abroad. Together with the economic situation, it is these matters which have forced many of those responsible for advertising to revisit Lord Leverhulme's commonplace that: 'Only half my advertising works. The trouble is I don't know which half.' Because now more than ever before, the pressure is on to increase the proportion of advertising that works.

33

This means that while conferences and seminars may provide some useful information, the books currently available on advertising, and how to do it, really don't. Those that are available tend to treat the process of producing advertising with too much respect. To give the impression that the work advertising agencies produce is invariably of the highest quality, deeply considered and remarkable value for money, is neither true nor likely to help those employees of the client company who are ultimately responsible.



- A** Thus, client companies almost everywhere took the view of one of their leaders quoted in the British trade magazine *Campaign*: ‘We want better strategies, better targeting, better creativity, better media placement, better thinking. We aim to ensure we get advertising agencies’ best people on our business and then ensure they are motivated to work their fingers to the bone, producing outstanding work for us.’
- B** The consequences have been that marketing activities have at last begun to be given the attention they deserve by management, that these people have acquired a little learning about the subject, and that a few brands have actually begun to be genuinely marketed.
- C** Ultimately, the poverty of the current advertising scene is due to the nature of the relationship between agencies and their clients. The best way of getting better advertising lies partly in improving this, and partly in adopting a more empirical approach to the whole advertising process.
- D** However, there was also evidence of more deep-seated change which would not simply be waved away as, and when, economic prospects brightened. The fact was that while this recession naturally caused potential clients to review, reconsider and often cut their budgets at the time, it also made them examine more closely than ever before the economics of advertising.
- E** It is not terribly surprising that, at the moment, help for those who want or need to do just that is far from freely available. Generally, companies and the advertising agencies they use have been far too busy simply coping with these circumstances to wish to talk or write about them, while those that have succeeded in keeping their heads above water are often understandably anxious to keep the secrets of their success to themselves.
- F** Seen, as they are, to spearhead efforts to support the bottom line, they suppose themselves to be under close enough scrutiny from their colleagues, let alone their bosses. Moreover, they are also faced with the very considerable problem of increasingly being asked to do their ever more difficult jobs with smaller and smaller budgets. They have been told that less must be more.
- G** Some of these are a direct consequence of the recession discussed earlier: the controversy over production costs, and the disinclination to take the sort of risks that are ironically often the essence of good advertising. Other events would have happened irrespective of local or global economic conditions.
- H** In Britain it meant in 1991 alone that while gross domestic product (GDP) stooped, interest rates remained punitively high, consumer spending on almost everything other than staples fell, more than half a million people lost their jobs, and some 75,000 homes were repossessed.

Content analysis

Reading component

The task, consisting of seven items, is presented in jumbled text / selected response format. Selected paragraphs are removed from a text and candidates are required to reinsert them in the correct place. The language of the text is at C2 level. Facility values, discrimination indices, etc. are provided in the statistical section below. Rasch difficulty values are calculated for each item to ensure consistency and the stability of the level across different test versions. All statistical information is based on a sample candidature of at least 20,000.

Text Characteristics

(Analysis of example tasks and items has been carried out in conjunction with the [Dutch CEF Grid](#), the [CEFR](#), the [ALTE](#) can-do statements and the [DIALANG](#) performance descriptors.)

Test to be analysed	CPE (Paper 1)
Task	Part 3 – questions 27 – 33
Skill	Reading
Rubric in L1/Target language	Target language
Target language	English
Item in L1/Target language	Target language
Time to do total task	Not specified (total test 90 minutes)
1. Text source	Book introduction
2. Authenticity	Adapted from genuine text
3. Discourse type	Argumentative / discursive
4. Discourse subtype	Comments
5. Domain	Personal
6. Topic	Services
7. Nature of content	Fairly extensive, abstract
8. Text length	Approx. 1000 words
9. Vocabulary	Extended
10. Grammar	Wide range of complex structures
Comprehensible by learner at CEF level	C2

Item Characteristics

Items 1 - 7 (27-33 in the Task)

All 7 Items are of the same type and involve the same operations:

Item type	Jumbled text – selected response
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to explicit details in the text.
	Understand main ideas and general meaning of texts.
	Recognise the use of cohesive devices in conjunction with lexical and logical coherence.
Item level estimated	C2

Answer Key

- 1 = H
- 2 = F
- 3 = B
- 4 = D
- 5 = A
- 6 = G
- 7 = E

Statistical Report

Statistical Report (Whole Task)

mean facility (p)	0.58
mean discrimination (Pb)	0.40

Statistical Report (Individual Items)

	item 27	item 28	item 29	item 30	item 31	item 32	item 33
Facility (p)	0.86	0.57	0.54	0.54	0.34	0.69	0.53
Discrimination (i.d.)	0.34	0.42	0.38	0.45	0.41	0.45	0.36
Sample size	>20,000						

Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) Listening

General information

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Candidature

CPE is taken by 45,000 candidates per year in 80 countries. Around 75% of CPE candidates are aged 25 or under. In some countries, where CPE is more commonly taken by candidates in their late teens, the average is lower. Around 85% of candidates attend preparation classes.

Structure of the Test

CPE tests the skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking and also has a Use of English Paper. CAE is administered in five separate papers. Paper 1 Reading, Paper 2 Writing, Paper 3 Use of English, Paper 4 Listening and Paper 5 Speaking. Each of these five papers is equally weighted at 20%. There are five possible grades in CPE: Three pass grades (A, B and C) and two fail grades (D and E). Results are based on candidates' aggregate scores across the four skills.

CPE Listening Paper

The listening paper consists of four parts and a total of seven listening texts. The paper has a standard structure and format so that candidates will know what to expect in each part of the paper. The range of texts and task types reflects the variety of listening situations which candidates at this level need to be able to cope with.

The instructions for each task are heard on the tape and are followed by a pause for candidates to study the task for that section. Candidates should use this time to study the questions on the page and to help them to predict what they will hear. This mirrors what happens in real-life listening situations when all speakers/listeners bring a variety of extra areas of background knowledge to any situation. Activities which help candidates understand the type of text they are listening to and the purpose of the tasks will guide candidates towards the appropriate listening strategies to use.

Part Two

Part two consists of one text with one or two speakers. Texts usually take the form of monologues or prompted monologues, in a semi-formal or neutral style. Texts typically take the form of talks, lectures and broadcasts of an informative nature aimed at a non-specialist audience. A series of nine independent sentences reports the main ideas from the text and candidates show their understanding of what they have heard by completing gaps in these sentences. The task focuses on the retrieval of specific information from the text as well as stated opinions and attitudes.

Listening (CEFR C2)

Test to be analysed	Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)
Target language	English
Task	Listening component (Paper 4, part 2)
Rubrics	Target language
Items	Target language
Time to do total test	approx. 40m
Target levels	CEFR C2 Mastery
	ALTE Level 5
Age-group sector	Late teenage and adults
Domain	public domain
Communicative activities	
Overall listening Comprehension	Can understand any native speaker interlocutor, even on abstract and complex topics of a specialist nature beyond his/her own field, given an opportunity to adjust to non standard accent or dialect. Listening comprehension ability approaches that of an educated native speaker of English.
Listening for Information	Can understand a wide range of recorded and broadcast audio material, including some non-standard usage, and identify finer points of detail including implicit attitudes and relationships between speakers.

Mark Distribution

Each of the items carries one mark, representing approximately 33 % of the marks available across the four parts of the paper.

Effective Level

All CPE Listening tasks are pre-tested using volunteer candidates. Typically, pre-test candidates are students preparing to take the exam in the near future. A range of age and nationality groups is represented in the pre-test population which roughly corresponds to that of the live candidature.

Pre-tested materials are then subject to statistical analysis at task and item level using both classical item analysis to establish that items are discriminating, and Rasch analysis to determine the level of difficulty. Each task, therefore, contains items within a given range of measured difficulty, and itself has an average level of difficulty. Tests are constructed from the tasks in the item bank. Each task, therefore, consists of items of measured (Rasch) difficulty, which are selected from within a specified range to determine the mean difficulty of the task.

Calibration

Tests are constructed from the calibrated tasks in the item bank. The one-parameter Rasch model is used for calibrating the items. For most routine analysis, Cambridge ESOL uses the BIGSTEPS analysis program supplemented by in-house programmes for formatting data and handling the output. The logit scale produced by BIGSTEPS is re-scaled to produce a conventional ESOL scale, which is used for test construction purposes. This is known as the common scale for item-based tests. The complete scale for Cambridge ESOL examinations, from KET (A2) to CPE (C2) covers a range from about 20 to 110. The expected range of values for CPE on this scale is approximately 70-90, with a target mean of 80.

Performance on This Task

This was a sentence-completion task based on a radio talk about a small mammal called the brown hare. Candidates performed well in this part. Candidates performed best on Question 13 but less well on Questions 10 and 17. In Question 10, the answer was 'conservationists' and weaker candidates had problems with either spelling or choosing between 'conservation' and 'conservationists'. Candidates either did not know this vocabulary or did not read the question carefully enough. In Question 17, the answer was 'plan of action' and weaker candidates misheard and wrote 'planned action' or 'planet action'. This highlights the importance of pronunciation work, e.g. weak forms, '-ed' past simple endings and linking, in preparation for listening tasks.



Listening Items

The Brown Hare

Instructions (recorded)

You will hear part of a talk about a small mammal called the brown hare. For questions 9-17, complete the sentences with a word or a short phrase.

The brown hare has often provided both

	9	with ideas for their work.
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A fall in the number of hares in Britain is a cause of concern for

	10
--	-----------

During the day, hares are often found in areas where

	11	give protection.
--	-----------	------------------

The behaviour known as 'pursuit deterrence' is said to save the

	12	of hares and foxes alike.
--	-----------	---------------------------

In Britain, hares are easiest to see in the month of

	13
--	-----------

partly because the days become longer.

Researchers were surprised to find that hares did not seem better off

as a result of developments in

	14
--	-----------

The population distribution of hares across Britain is described as

	15
--	-----------

An organisation called the

	16
--	-----------

has set up projects aimed at helping hares.

What's referred to as a

	17
--	-----------

has been produced to try to reverse the fall in hare numbers in Britain.

Content analysis

Listening component

The time allocated to the complete test paper (paper 4) is 45 minutes. (The paper consists of FOUR tasks.)

Text Characteristics

(Analysis of example tasks and items has been carried out in conjunction with the [Dutch CEF Grid](#), the [CEFR](#), the [ALTE](#) can-do statements and the [DIALANG](#) performance descriptors.)

Test to be analysed	CPE (Paper 4)
Analysts	PH, NS, NK, HD, NJ
Task	Part 2 – questions 9-17
Skill	Listening
Rubric in L1/Target language	TL
Target Language	English
Item in L1/Target language	TL
Time to do total task	Not specified
1. Text source	Radio interview
2. Authenticity	Genuine, not adapted
3. Discourse type	Mainly descriptive
4. Discourse subtype	Radio interview, introduced monologue
5. Domain	Personal
6. Topic	Environment, wildlife
7. Nature of content	Mostly concrete
8. Text length	5 minutes
9. Vocabulary	Extended
10. Grammar	Limited range of complex structures
11. Text speed	Normal speed for context
12. Number of participants	Two
13. Accent	Northern English (mild accent)
14. Clarity of articulation	Clear
15. How often played (how many times?)	Twice
Comprehensible by learner at CEF level	C2

Item Characteristics:

Items 9-17 have the same format and display identical operational characteristics.

Item Type	Open-ended questions – complete with information from the text
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve
	Information explicit in text
	Listening for a detail. Recognising the detail when expressed in a (written) form different from that used in the text.
Item level estimated	C1

Answer Key

- 9 = artist(s) / painters and writers
- 10 = conservationists
- 11 = water plants
- 12 = energy
- 13 = March
- 14 = agriculture
- 15 = uneven
- 16 = wildlife trust
- 17 = plan of action

Statistical Report

Statistical Report (whole task)

mean facility (p)	0.46
mean discrimination	0.38

Statistical Report (individual items)

	item 9	item 10	item 11	item 12	item 13	item 14	item 15	item 16	item 17
Facility (p)	0.52	0.2	0.54	0.80	0.86	0.59	0.32	0.20	0.25
Discrimination (i.d.)	0.46	0.31	0.39	0.31	0.30	0.44	0.48	0.39	0.34
Sample size	>5000								