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Preliminary English Test (PET) Reading

General information

Background to the Examination

Preliminary English Test (PET) is a general English qualification which is part of the Cambridge ESOL Main-suite examinations. Set at level B1 of the CEF, PET recognises the ability to cope with everyday written and spoken communications. PET is designed for learners whose English skills are adequate for many practical purposes, including work, study and social situations which require a predictable use of language.

Candidature

PET is taken by more than 112,000 people per year in over 80 countries. Around 70% of PET candidates are aged 20 or under and a further 20% are in the 21-30 age group. Around 80% of candidates attend preparation classes.

Structure of the Test

PET tests the skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking – with each skill equally weighted at 25%. PET is administered in three separate papers. Paper 1 Reading and Writing, Paper 2 Listening and Paper 3 Speaking. There are four possible grades in PET: Two pass grades (pass with merit and pass) and two fail grades (narrow fail and fail). Results are based on candidates' aggregate scores across the four skills.

PET Reading and Writing Paper

The paper has a fixed format, with Parts 1-5 testing reading skills through a variety of texts ranging from very short notices to longer continuous texts. Candidates are assessed on their ability to understand written English at word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and whole text level. PET candidates should be able to understand factual texts taken from signs, brochures, newspapers and magazines. They should be able to understand the main message of a text and the effect it may have on the target reader, as well as having strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words and structures. Other tasks on the paper include: reading multiple texts for specific information (matching task); processing a factual text for specific information (true-false task); reading for detailed comprehension, gist and global meaning (multiple-choice questions) and reading for understanding of lexico-structural patterns in a text (multiple-choice cloze).

Part One

This task focuses on reading for detailed understanding and the main message. Each text is a short message taken from real life. This could be a notice or a sign, or the information printed on product packaging. Understanding of each text is tested through one, four-option multiple-choice question (MCQ) which focuses either on the overall message or on a point of detail in the text. The notices selected for this test occur in a range of settings, including a hospital car park, a school notice board and a hairdresser's window. Their subject matter reflects core PET topics such as entertainment, services, sport and leisure.

Reading (CEFR B1)

Test to be analysed	Preliminary English Test (PET)
Target language	English
Task	Reading Component (part 1) Q's 1 - 5. (These questions were taken from tests produced before the 2004 revision of the PET).
Rubrics	Target language
Items	Target language
Time to do total test	1 hr 30 m
Target levels	CEFR B1
	ALTE 2
Age-group sector	Teenagers and adults
Domain	Public domain
Communicative activities	
Overall reading comprehension	Can understand short, simple texts containing high frequency vocabulary.
Reading for information and argument	Can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements.

Mark Distribution

Each of the five items carries one mark, representing just under 15% of the marks available across the five reading tasks.

Effective Level

All PET 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 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 (Microcat) 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. 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 PET on this scale is approximately 50-70, with a target mean of 56.

Performance of this Task

Most candidates handled the questions well. Question 4 was the easiest and Questions 2 and 3 were the most challenging. In Question 2, a substantial number of candidates chose option B, rather than C, the correct answer. This was possibly because the wording of the sentence in B represents plausible action in a real world situation. Sentence B also uses two key words from the notice: 'free' and 'emergency', whereas C, the correct answer, explains the meaning of the notice by means of a negative paraphrase: 'leave free' becomes 'must not park'. Clearly this match requires close understanding of both the notice and the option. In Question 3, some candidates were attracted to options B and C: B, although plausible, is not what the notice says, since the event has simply been moved from Monday to Tuesday; in C, the use of 'place' is distracting weaker candidates, picking up on the phrase 'take place' in the notice. The correct answer, D, requires understanding of the phrasal verb 'put off', which may have caused problems for weaker candidates.

Reading Items

All questions (5 items + example) relating to the texts are in multiple choice format. The language of the text itself and of the items is adapted for A2 or B1 level comprehension. The questions, however, demand more highly developed comprehension skills than the texts, since the language of the questions is generally more grammatically complex than that of the texts. Thus, the task is deemed to operate at B1 level. Facility values, discrimination indices, etc. are provided in the statistical section. 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 10,000.

Questions 1–5

Look at the sign in each question.
Someone asks you what it means.
Mark the letter next to the correct explanation **– A, B, C** or **D – on your answer sheet.**

Item 0 – example item

Example:

REGENCY CAMERAS

Buy two films and get one FREE

A Buy three films for the price of two.

B Get a free film with every one you buy.

C One film free with each camera.

D Films bought here are printed free.

Item 1

Theatre Ticket Office

Open every day 9 – 4 and for 15 minutes before each performance

A You can buy tickets between 9 and 4 or just before the show begins.

B The ticket office remains open for 15minutes during each performance.

C When there is a performance, tickets are not available after 4 o'clock.

D Tickets are on sale at the office until 15 minutes before the show starts.

Item 2

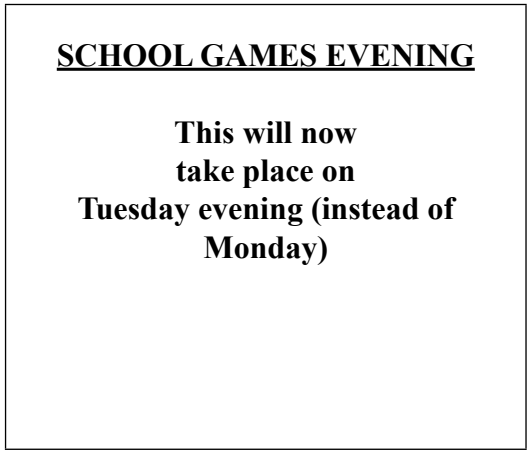
A Visitors can park here if the space is empty.

B Visitors can park here free in an emergency.

C Visitors must not park their vehicles here.

D Visitors do not need to pay to park here.

Item 3



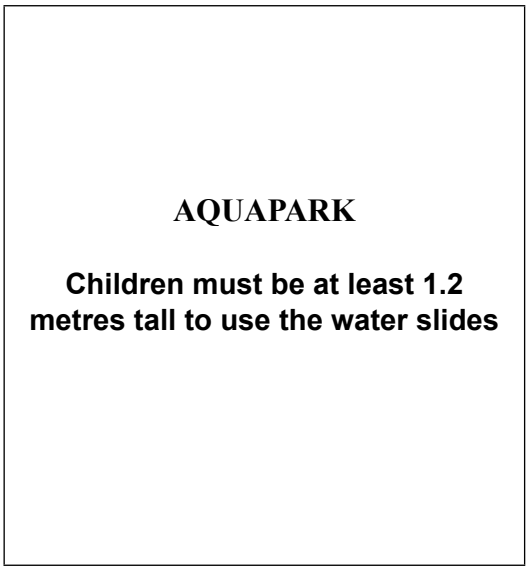
A There will be a games evening at the school on Monday and Tuesday.

B The school has cancelled next Tuesday's games evening.

C The games evening on Tuesday will be in a different place.

D The school has put off the games evening until Tuesday.

tem 4



A Children are warned that this water is 1.2 metres deep.

B You should not use the slides unless you are 1.2 metres or over.

C These water slides are only for children who are under 1.2 metres tall.

D Do not dive into the water when it is less than 1.2 metres deep.

Item 5

Julie's Hair Care

Please tell us how we could improve our service

A We would like your ideas on how we could care for you better.

B We can tell you how to improve the way you care for your hair.

C We thank our customers for advice that has led to an improved service.

D We think we can give you a better service than any other hairdresser.

Content analysis

Reading component

The tasks, instructions, rubrics and items are all in English, the target language.
The time allocated to the complete test paper (paper 1) is 90 minutes. (Paper one consists of reading and writing tasks.) No time allocation is specified for individual tasks/components within the test or sub-tests.

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	PET (Paper)
Task	Part 1 - questions 1 - 5
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 90m)
1. Text source	Genuine notices
2. Authenticity	Adapted /simplified
3. Discourse type	Instructive
4. Discourse subtype	Announcements, notices, instructions
5. Domain	Public domain
6. Topic	Daily life, leisure, services
7. Nature of content	Mostly concrete
8. Text length	5 x 15 words
9. Vocabulary	Only frequently occurring
10. Grammar	Simple structures only
Comprehensible by learner at CEF level	B1

Item Characteristics

Item 0 – example item

Item type	MCQ - four options
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to specific details in the text.
	Intensive reading and detailed comprehension.
	Understanding rephrased information and explanations of texts.
Item level estimated	B1

Item 1

Item type	MCQ - four options
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to specific details in the text.
	Intensive reading and detailed comprehension.
	Understanding rephrased information and explanations of texts.
Item level estimated	B1

Item 2

Item type	MCQ - four options
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to specific details in the text.
	Intensive reading and detailed comprehension.
	Understanding rephrased information and explanations of texts.
Item level estimated	B1

Item 3

Item type	MCQ - four options
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to specific details in the text.
	Intensive reading and detailed comprehension.
	Understanding rephrased information and explanations of texts.
Item level estimated	B1

Item 4

Item type	MCQ – four options
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to specific details in the text.
	Intensive reading and detailed comprehension.
	Understanding rephrased information and explanations of texts.
Item level estimated	B1

Item 5

Item type	MCQ - four options
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve information relating to specific details in the text.
	Intensive reading and detailed comprehension.
	Understanding rephrased information and explanations of texts.
Item level estimated	B1

Answer Key

1 = A
2 = C
3 = D
4 = B
5 = A

Statistical Report

Statistical Report (whole task)

mean facility (p)	**0.76**
mean discrimination (Pb)	**0.37**

Statistical Report (individual items)

	item 0	item 1	item 2	item 3	item 4	item 5
Facility (p)	e.g.	0.77	0.73	0.69	0.84	0.76
Discrimination (i.d.)	e.g.	0.37	0.29	0.47	0.39	0.34
Sample size	>10,000					

Preliminary English Test (PET) Listening

General information

Background to the Examination

PET is a general English qualification which is part of the Cambridge ESOL Main-suite examinations. Set at level B1 of the CEF, PET recognises the ability to cope with everyday written and spoken communications. PET is designed for learners whose English skills are adequate for many practical purposes, including work, study and social situations which require a predictable use of language.

Candidature

PET is taken by more than 112,000 people per year in over 80 countries. Around 70% of PET candidates are aged 20 or under and a further 20% are in the 21-30 age group. Around 80% of candidates attend preparation classes.

Structure of the Test

PET tests the skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking – with each skill equally weighted at 25%. PET is administered in three separate papers. Paper 1 Reading and Writing, Paper 2 Listening and Paper 3 Speaking. There are four possible grades in PET: Two pass grades (pass with merit and pass) and two fail grades (narrow fail and fail). Results are based on the candidate's aggregate scores across the four skills.

PET Listening Paper (Paper 2)

The paper has a fixed format, with Parts 1-4 testing listening skills by means of TEN texts, reflecting the variety of listening situations which candidates at this level can be expected to deal with. The tasks correspond to real-life listening situations where knowledge of and familiarity with the context and the speaker assists accurate comprehension.
Each text is played twice to candidates.

Part Three

This task focuses on listening for detailed understanding and the retrieval of specific information. Irrelevant information is included in the text and candidates are expected to recognize and ignore this in favour of what is relevant to task completion. The text takes the form of an informational monologue, taken from a range of contexts which may include radio announcements or recorded messages providing information about places or events.

Listening (CEFR B1)

Test to be analysed	Preliminary English Test (PET)
Target language	English
Task	Listening component (paper 2, part 3)
Rubrics	Target language
Items	Target language
Time to do total test	35m (inc. 6 m transfer time)
Target levels	CEFR B1 threshold
	ALTE 2
Age-group sector	Teenagers and adults
Domain	Public domain
Communicative activities	
Overall listening comprehension	Can listen to, identify and interpret information in a recorded message.
Listening for information	Can identify and select relevant (specific) detail from a text containing some irrelevant information.

Mark Distribution

Each of the six items carries one mark, representing just under 25% of the marks available across the four listening tasks.

Effective Level

All PET 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 PET on this scale is approximately 46-66, with a target mean of 56.

Performance of this Task

This task tests the candidates' ability to listen out for and write down specific information from the listening text. Candidates generally found this the most challenging part of the test, although most managed to write acceptable answers for questions 15, 16 and 18. Question 17, which tested a lower-frequency word at PET level and question 19, which tested a high-frequency word in a less familiar context, proved more challenging. These questions did, however, discriminate well between weak and strong candidates. A range of unambiguous misspellings was accepted for all answers.

Listening Items

Text

The language of the text itself and of the items is adapted for B1 level comprehension from a genuine recorded information message.

Questions

The questions take the form of a gap-filling exercise – (see below)

Questions 14 – 19 Instructions (recorded)

You will hear a recorded message about Finchbrooke Country Park.
For each question, fill in the missing information in the numbered space.

Finchbrooke Country Park

Opening times:

Park: Every day (8.a.m. – 7.00 p.m.)

Visitors' Centre: **(14)** ..... - Sunday (9.00 a.m. – 5.30 p.m)

From the town centre, take bus number **(15)** ..... .

Inside the Visitors' Centre, you can buy books and videos and

get free **(16)** ..... .

If the Visitors' Centre is shut, a telephone can be found

at the **(17)** ..... to the park.

In the park, you can go cycling, **(18)** ..... and camping.

Group visits include a **(19)** ..... and a guided tour.

Content analysis

Listening component

The time allocated to the complete the test paper (paper 2) is 35 minutes. (Paper two 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	PET (Paper 2) Listening
Task	Part 3
Rubric in L1/Target language	Target language
Item in L1/Target language	Target language
Item in L1/Target language	TL
1. Text source	Public information
2. Authenticity	Genuine (adapted)
3. Discourse type	Recorded message
4. Discourse subtype	Mainly descriptive
5. Domain	Public
6. Topic	Free time and entertainment
7. Nature of content	Concrete
8. Text length	2 minutes
9. Vocabulary	Only frequently occurring
10. Grammar	Simple structures only
11. Text Speed	Normal speed for context
12. Number of participants	One
13. Accent	Standard English
14. Clarity of articulation	Clear
15. How often played (how many times?)	Twice
Comprehensible by learner at CEF level	B1

Item Characteristics

Item type, operations and CEFR target level are identical for all items.

Item Type	Gap filling
Operations involved in answering	Recognise and retrieve
	Information explicit in text
	Specific detail
Item level estimated	B1

Answer Key

14 = (is open) Tuesday (to Sunday)
15 = 109 / One hundred and nine
16 = Map(s)
17 = (park) Entrance (to the park)
18 = Fishing (on the lake)
19 = Talk

Statistical Report

Statistical Report (whole task)

mean facility (p)	**0.74**
mean discrimination	**0.42**

Statistical Report (individual items)

	item 14	item 15	item 16	item 17	item 18	item 19
Facility (p)	0.68	0.91	0.84	0.71	0.85	0.43
Discrimination (i.d.)	0.38	0.34	0.39	0.45	0.42	0.53
Sample size	>17,000					