

LanguageCert General and Academic Tests: Independent CEFR referencing

CEFR Levels and Global Descriptors		Recommended LanguageCert GS* score
C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.	Academic: 90+
C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.	Academic: 75-89 General: 75-82
B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	Academic: 60-74 General: 60-74
B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.	Academic: 40-59 General: 40-59
A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.	General: 20

*LanguageCert Global Scale

Independent review of LanguageCert tests against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has found that the LanguageCert General test provides a sound assessment of English language competence at CEFR levels A2-C1 and that the LanguageCert Academic test assesses CEFR levels B1-C2.

Context and Scope

Ecctis was commissioned to carry out an independent evaluation and referencing of the LanguageCert General and Academic tests. The tests are four-skill, multi-level, English language proficiency tests available for test-takers to take as a computer-based or paper-based test. Computer-based is the primary option and can be taken at home or at a LanguageCert test centre. All skills are equally weighted, and the tests are primarily intended to provide an assessment of English language proficiency for those intending to live, work, study, or train in an English-speaking context (General) or those who intend to enter Higher Education with an English-medium of instruction (Academic).

Methodology

This study employed Ecctis' established methodology for the benchmarking of English language proficiency tests, informed by the Council of Europe 2009 Manual¹ and the 2020 Companion Volume.² This encompassed a desk-based review of LanguageCert test specifications, assessment development procedures, test items, marked test-taker samples, and relevant mark schemes. Analyses of test items were presented to an internal panel for peer review of the CEFR level findings made.

In order to undertake the evaluation, a number of documents were reviewed, including quality assurance documentation, examiner training documentation, grading criteria, and anonymised test-taker samples. The results shown in this document stem from a follow-up review undertaken in October 2023. The follow-up review was prompted by LanguageCert actioning recommendations from an initial review in July. The test papers used to inform the results of Ecctis' CEFR referencing study were collected by LanguageCert and submitted to Ecctis between April 2023 and October 2023.

Key findings

Overall, Ecctis' review of test construct, individual assessment tasks, input texts, marked test-taker samples, and mark schemes found the tests to provide a sound assessment of English language competence in listening and reading at CEFR levels A2-C1 in the General test and CEFR levels B1-C2 in the Academic test. The productive tasks were found to allow candidates the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency at the intended CEFR levels. An analysis of the mark schemes found that the General writing test aligns with CEFR levels A1-C1 and that the speaking test aligns with CEFR A2-C1. An analysis of the mark schemes found that both the Academic writing and speaking tests align with CEFR A1-C2.

¹ Council of Europe (2009) *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) – A Manual*. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680667a2d>.

² Council of Europe (2020) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume*.

Listening

	LanguageCert Global Scale							
Listening	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-100
General	A2		B1		B2		C1	
Academic			B1		B2		C1	
							C2	

The duration of the listening section in the General test is approximately 30 minutes and is approximately 40 minutes in the Academic test. Each test comprises of 30 multiple-choice or open response items, divided across four parts with individual input audio recordings. Test-takers are expected to utilise a wide range of oral comprehension strategies, such as listening for key information and the main ideas of information content, following extended discourse, inferring attitudes, moods and intentions, and vocabulary knowledge. The input audio texts depict a range of authentic themes, such as everyday informal transactions, work-based conversations and presentations in the General test and education-based conversation, formal academic discussions, as well as lectures, presentations and interviews covering complex topics in the Academic test.

The listening items sampled in the LanguageCert General and Academic listening sections targeted a wide range of CEFR oral comprehension competences, and included: *overall oral comprehension, understanding as a member of a live audience, understanding audio (or signed) media and recordings, understanding conversation between other people, sociolinguistic appropriateness, vocabulary range, and identifying cues and inferring.*

Reading

	LanguageCert Global Scale							
Reading	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-100
General	A2		B1		B2		C1	
Academic			B1		B2		C1	
							C2	

The duration of the reading section is 50 minutes in both the General and Academic tests. Each test comprises of 30 multiple-choice, cloze, and matching items, divided across five parts with individual input texts. Test-takers are expected to utilise a wide range of reading comprehension strategies, such as skimming and scanning for key factual information, reading for overall meaning, main ideas, and conclusions, reading for implicitly stated information and argument, recognising different textual structures, deducing word and sentence meaning, inference using contextual clues, and vocabulary knowledge. The reading input texts depict a range of authentic themes, such as everyday and job-related topics in the General test and a range of educational, scientific, and specialist topics in the Academic test.

The reading items sampled in the LanguageCert General and Academic reading sections targeted a wide range of CEFR reading comprehension competences, and included: *overall reading comprehension, reading for orientation, reading for information and argument, identifying cues and inferring, plurilingual comprehension, vocabulary control, and vocabulary range.*

Writing

LanguageCert Global Scale								
Writing	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-100
General	A2		B1		B2	C1		
Academic			B1		B2	C1		C2

The duration of the writing section in the General test is 45 minutes and is 50 minutes in the Academic test. In both tests, the sections comprise of two parts, each with an individual input task prompt; tasks include producing correspondence, reports, articles, or narrative texts. The writing input prompts are appropriate for each intended test-taker demographic and allow test-takers the scope to demonstrate appropriate levels of written production.

Both parts in the writing test are marked against criteria which assess accuracy and range of grammar, accuracy and range of vocabulary, organisation and coherence, and task fulfilment. Each of the two parts are marked separately and weighted at 40% and 60% of the total mark for the writing section, respectively.

The writing items sampled in the LanguageCert General and Academic writing sections targeted a range of CEFR written production skills and included: *overall written production, overall written interaction, reports and essays, coherence and cohesion, thematic development, explaining data in writing, processing text in writing, sociolinguistic appropriateness, vocabulary range, and general linguistic range*. The items also addressed receptive skills, such as *overall reading comprehension*, in order to access the written prompts.

Speaking

LanguageCert Global Scale								
Speaking	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-100
General	A2		B1		B2	C1		
Academic			B1		B2	C1		C2

The duration of the speaking section in the General test is approximately 12 minutes and is approximately 14 minutes in the Academic test. In both tests, the sections comprise of four parts, each with an individual input task prompt. Tasks include open response items, role-play scenarios, reading passages aloud with follow-up questions and a final monologue presentation with follow-up questions. The speaking input prompts are appropriate for each intended test-taker demographic and allow test-takers the scope to demonstrate appropriate levels of spoken production.

Both parts in the speaking test are marked against five criteria which assess task fulfilment and communicative effect, accuracy and range of vocabulary, accuracy and range of grammar, coherence, fluency, intonation, and pronunciation. Task fulfilment and communicative effect is double weighted with all other criteria being weighted equally. The four parts of the speaking section are marked as a whole, with one overall mark awarded and all four parts weighted equally within the section.

The speaking items sampled in the LanguageCert General and Academic speaking sections targeted a range of CEFR oral production skills and included: *overall oral production*, *overall oral interaction*, *sustained monologue: putting a case*, *sustained monologue: describing experience*, *explaining data in speech and sign*, *sociolinguistic appropriateness*, *vocabulary range*, and *general linguistic range*. The items also addressed receptive skills, such as *overall reading comprehension*, in order to access the read-aloud texts and the labels on the visual stimuli.

Grading, certification, marking, moderation

Upon completion of the LanguageCert General and Academic tests, test-takers are provided with an overall score on the LanguageCert Global Scale for each skill, a total score on the LanguageCert Global Scale and an overall CEFR ability level; marks and feedback comments are displayed on a certificate for each of the marking criteria. The reading and listening sections of the LanguageCert tests are machine marked, whereas the writing and speaking sections are human marked. All markers are regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure reliability and accuracy of scores.