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**CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH**  
Language Assessment  
Part of the University of Cambridge

# Cambridge English **Business** Higher

*Achieve your ambitions in international business*

## **Information for candidates**



**CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH**  
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Business English Certificates (BEC)

[www.cambridgeenglish.org/bec-higher](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/bec-higher)



## How to use this guide

You can print this document if you wish, but it is better to read it on screen. Click the links in the document to access other useful online resources such as videos and practice tests, and to find the information you need.

## What does Cambridge English: Business Higher involve?


*Cambridge English: Business Higher* is the highest of the three exams in the general Business English suite offered by Cambridge English Language Assessment. It can be taken in both paper-based and computer-based formats. It is at Level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and is accepted by educational organisations, government bodies and leading international companies worldwide as an indication that you have achieved a high level of skill in the English language.

Cambridge English Language Assessment carries out extensive research, to make sure that you get the fairest, most accurate result, and that the exam is relevant to the range of uses for which you need English. Studying for the exam will give you real-life language skills which will enable you to use English confidently in international business environments.


## About the exam


Here's a summary of what's in the exam:

Paper details	What's in the paper?	Skills assessed
<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>1 hour</p> <p>25% of total marks</p> <p>Parts 1-3: Reading component</p> <p>Parts 4-6: text-based Use of English tasks</p>	<p>First there are three long <b>Reading</b> texts: multiple matching, gapped paragraphs and multiple choice.</p> <p>Then there are three shorter <b>Use of English</b> texts, each with a different task, such as supplying a missing word or forming a new word.</p> <p>Texts are all business related.</p> <p>They are adapted from real-world publications and so are often aimed at a managerial level and reflect international business practices. You don't need lots of specialist knowledge to read them.</p>	<p>The reading skills you need include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading for the main idea</li> <li>• finding specific information and reading for detail</li> <li>• understanding attitude, opinion and the writer's purpose</li> <li>• interpreting visual information</li> <li>• reading for gist, inference and global meaning</li> <li>• understanding text structure or following an argument</li> <li>• understanding vocabulary and grammar in a short text</li> <li>• proofreading</li> <li>• working out meaning from context.</li> </ul>

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Paper details	What's in the paper?	Skills assessed
<p><b>Writing</b></p> <p>1 hour 10 minutes</p> <p>25% of total marks</p>	<p>You have to produce two pieces of writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ a compulsory short report based on a graph</li><li>▪ a choice from various tasks, such as a business letter, proposal or longer report.</li></ul>	<p>You're tested on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ how well you fulfil each task and its purpose</li><li>▪ whether you've used the right register and conventions for the task</li><li>▪ how well you can put together and develop ideas on the topic</li><li>▪ the accuracy and range of your use of language.</li></ul>
<p><b>Listening</b></p> <p>40 minutes</p> <p>25% of total marks</p>	<p>There are three parts, covering a range of recordings.</p> <p>Tasks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ completing notes from a speech</li><li>▪ two simultaneous matching tasks based on five short monologues</li><li>▪ multiple-choice questions on a longer piece.</li></ul> <p>You'll have to deal with the language you might meet in presentations, lectures, interviews, discussions and more informal business conversations.</p>	<p>This tests your ability to listen for a wide variety of real-life purposes, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ listening for specific information</li><li>▪ identifying the topic</li><li>▪ understanding attitudes and opinions</li><li>▪ listening for details</li><li>▪ listening for the overall meaning of a whole extract.</li></ul>
<p><b>Speaking</b></p> <p>16 minutes</p> <p>Paired: two candidates together</p> <p>25% of total marks</p>	<p>The <b>Speaking</b> paper has three parts and the tasks involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ answering some individual questions from the examiner about yourself and business-related topics</li><li>▪ preparing and then giving a short talk</li><li>▪ discussing a business-related situation with another candidate, before reaching a decision.</li></ul>	<p>You're tested on many things, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ your grammar and vocabulary</li><li>▪ pronunciation, including intonation</li><li>▪ fluency</li><li>▪ the appropriate extent of your answers</li><li>▪ your ability to organise your thoughts, negotiate and sustain a discussion.</li></ul>

- ➔ [Download a complete sample paper.](#)
- ➔ [Try a computer-based practice test.](#)



## Before the exam – preparation

It is important to familiarise yourself with the tasks and what they demand of you, and to get accustomed to doing them. They are designed to enable you to show what you can do in English, but only if you understand them fully first! For example, in the Speaking test if you are not familiar with what is required in a short space of time, then you may not be able to demonstrate your true ability.

Although learning business vocabulary and doing practice tests are certainly important, these are not shortcuts and they should be just part of your overall exam preparation. In preparing for the exam, you need to take a whole and long-term approach to your communicative language ability, analysing your own strengths and weaknesses across all language skills.

To help you get ready for *Cambridge English: Business Higher*, there is a range of **free exam preparation resources**, including:

- tips and FAQs for each exam paper
- sample papers and a computer-based practice test

To support learners as they prepare for their exams, Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press have developed a range of **official preparation materials**, including coursebooks and practice tests.



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How much do you know about preparing for *Cambridge English: Business Higher*?

### Can you answer these questions?

1. *Are you testing my business knowledge?*
2. *Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?*
3. *How can I make best use of an advanced monolingual business dictionary to prepare for Cambridge English: Business Higher?*
4. *What about the grammar of Business English? How can I best pick that up?*
5. *What kinds of things should I be reading in addition to any coursebooks I might be using?*
6. *The Reading paper tests reading in different ways. How can I practise doing this?*
7. *How can I best prepare myself for the Writing paper?*
8. *What else can I listen to outside the classroom?*
9. *What is the best way to develop my speaking skills?*
10. *How is Speaking assessed?*
11. *How is Writing assessed?*

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## ANSWERS

### Preparing for Cambridge English: Business Higher

#### 1. *Are you testing my business knowledge?*

This exam is a test of English language, but in a business context. Of course, you will have the opportunity to write and talk about your business situation in the Writing and Speaking papers, so if you are working in a company you can draw upon your own business knowledge in these papers. But 'business knowledge' here includes what you've learned about the subject if you are still a student, so you are not at any disadvantage if you are in that position. It's the same in the Reading and Listening papers: we do not require you to have expert, specialist knowledge, but you need to be well read and therefore well informed about general international business practices.

#### 2. *Where can I find out exactly what I have to do in each part of the test?*

You can download a sample paper [here](#), and the Cambridge English Language Assessment [website](#) has more information. If you are taking a computer-based exam, you can try a computer-based practice test [here](#). (Please note that this only works with the most recent version of Firefox.)

#### 3. *How can I make best use of an advanced monolingual business dictionary to prepare for Cambridge English: Business Higher?*

For obvious reasons it's a good idea to have a reference source: a lot of business terms have a highly specific meaning (for example the words 'remuneration' and 'costs' are used slightly differently in Business and General English). You'll need this for all papers. But also some active studying of your dictionary can be highly beneficial in preparing for Parts 4–6 of the Reading paper. A good dictionary will list multiple word meanings and show how a keyword is used in set phrases and collocations (common word partnerships). In Business English there is a huge amount of fixed language with set expressions. Learning as many of these as you can will help you with the lexical aspect of Parts 4–6 and also with understanding the longer texts in Parts 1–3. You'll also be able to use these words and expressions in the Writing paper. A good dictionary of this kind will also take data from spoken sources, so it will help with the Listening and Speaking papers too.



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#### 4. *What about the grammar of Business English? How can I best pick that up?*

You are quite right that grammar is important: in the Writing and Speaking papers, for example, producing accurate language is part of communicating effectively. However, as direct preparation for the grammatical gap fill (Part 5 Reading paper) and error-correction task (Part 6), reading a grammar book excessively may not be the best way of spending your time. If you attend a Business English course, and read and listen widely outside the classroom, you will be addressing your whole communicative ability in English, and your grammar will improve as a by-product of doing tasks.

#### 5. *What kinds of things should I be reading in addition to any coursebooks I might be using?*

Past papers and other practice tests can be very useful, even if you just read them as texts and don't answer the questions. It is not necessary to read highly specialised business journals or magazines, but some general-interest business magazines are useful, as are the business sections of quality newspapers. However, when looking at newspapers, don't just look at the articles – you will benefit from reading written interviews, biographies, reports, book reviews and advertisements. If you look at past papers you will see that these are the kinds of things that you either have to read about in the Reading paper or be able to write yourself in the Writing paper. And of course the written interviews also give you useful spoken language of the type used in the Listening paper.



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## 6. *The Reading paper tests reading in different ways. How can I practise doing this?*

Sometimes you read in detail and try to understand everything within a paragraph. Sometimes you can just skim read an article, or part of it – set yourself time limits to force yourself to speed read. When you do this you are trying to understand the main points, not the details. Another good idea is to try and follow the argument in a long text as it develops, looking particularly at the opening sentences of each paragraph. Then look away and retell that argument in your own words. This will help you feel more confident and will make you realise that you don't always need to understand every word of every text.

## 7. *How can I best prepare myself for the Writing paper?*

In points 3 and 5 above we have already talked about how you can help yourself regarding reading widely and using a dictionary actively. In addition you should:

- Practise writing under exam time conditions so that it becomes a habit.
- Familiarise yourself with the assessment criteria – *Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language*. See **page 9** for more about how Writing is assessed.
- Write 10-minute plans for a variety of questions in past papers, so that planning becomes automatic and quick.
- Be sure to familiarise yourself with sample answers in your course material and practice test books. This way you can see how answers should be structured, see how the writer is aware of the target reader, and get an idea of the variety of grammatical structures and range of vocabulary that is required.

## 8. *What else can I listen to outside the classroom?*

Internet podcasts are very useful and there are many presentations available on YouTube, for example. There are many techniques you can use for listening to these, such as pausing and summarising in your own words, and practising note-taking skills. Listening to business programmes on English-speaking TV channels and radio stations will also give you valuable practice.



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### 9. What is the best way to develop my speaking skills?

Take every opportunity to speak English. Can you talk fluently about a variety of business issues and practices? Do you have the vocabulary to do so? Remember that a lot of business vocabulary consists of set phrases and expressions, so you will feel more confident if you have these 'building blocks' which all native speakers use. But this does not mean that you should memorise set speeches. If you did this it would not help you as you would not sound natural and the examiner would spot what you were doing. Your aim should be to use English spontaneously and naturally without needing to think much about it!

You may also find it useful to record yourself speaking English and listen back to yourself. This can help you focus on your pronunciation.

### 10. How is Speaking assessed?

In the Speaking exam, there are two examiners. The interlocutor, who speaks to you, awards a mark for global achievement. The assessor, who just listens, uses these assessment criteria: *Grammatical Resource and Lexical Resource, Discourse Management, Pronunciation and Interactive Communication*. *Discourse Management* is to do with your fluency and how well you organise your ideas.

### 11. How is Writing assessed?

Writing tasks are marked using four criteria: *Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language*.

- **Content** focuses on how well you have fulfilled the task, in other words if you have done what you were asked to do.
- **Communicative Achievement** focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the particular task and whether you have used the appropriate style and conventions.
- **Organisation** focuses on the way you put together the piece of writing, in other words if it is logical and ordered.
- **Language** focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

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How much do you know about practical things to do before the exam?

### Can you answer these questions?

1. How can I find practice tests?
2. How do I register for the exam?
3. Can I take one paper later than the others if I don't feel ready for it?
4. What is the Notice to Candidates?
5. What do I need to take with me on exam day?
6. How do I register for results online?

Find the answers on the next page



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When I prepared for *Cambridge English: Business Higher*, I really felt that I was undertaking training on business, training on how to be a successful employee, training on how to be a great boss, and it was all in English.

Xiaolei Zhang, China

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### Practical things to do before the exam

#### 1. *How can I find practice tests?*

Official books of practice tests are **available online** or from bookshops. There is also a free sample online test.

#### 2. *How do I register for the exam?*

If you are already at a school that offers a course in the exam, they will do this for you. If you are registering independently, click **here** and find a centre that offers *Business Higher*. You can register directly with them, and they will be able to give you advice about preparation, give you exam dates and tell you how much it will cost.

#### 3. *Can I take one paper later than the others if I don't feel ready for it?*

No, all papers must be taken in a single session.

#### 4. *What is the Notice to Candidates?*

It's a list of things you can and can't do in the exam room. Your exam centre will give you a copy, but you can also see a copy online **here**.

#### 5. *What do I need to take with me on exam day?*

Just your passport for identification. A bottle of water is a good idea. You can take pens and pencils, but your centre will also provide these.

#### 6. *How do I register for results online?*

When you register for the exam, you will receive a Confirmation of Entry. This will show the web address for our Results Online site, as well as your ID number and secret number, which you will need to use to register to receive your results online. It is a good idea to register for results online a few weeks before your exam - we may send you useful information and important updates by email.



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## Exam day

It is natural to have nerves on exam day, but you can feel better prepared and less nervous if you know exactly what to expect on the day. Doing practice tests and getting used to filling in the answer sheet is a vital part of this. You can practise this on the **online sample test**. You should expect a photograph to be taken of you at the centre.

You may also be given a sheet of candidate data to fill in. (Don't worry about this – it's just to enable us to keep accurate records on the ages and nationalities of candidates taking each exam.) If you are entering the exam independently you can contact your local centre with any practical queries you may have. You can find your local centre **here**.

Before you take your exam, be sure to visit the **What to expect on exam day** web page and read the **Summary Regulations for Candidates**.



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## EXAM DAY TIPS

- ✓ Go into the exam with a clear head and a good night's sleep – you will need to be fresh as a lot of concentration is required.
- ✓ In the Reading and Writing papers, you can do the tasks in any order you wish, to suit your particular strengths. Make sure you fill in the answer sheet carefully.
- ✓ With Reading Parts 4-6 (the Use of English component) make sure you read the texts as far as possible before starting on any of the gaps. This will give you an idea of what the text is about, and then it becomes much easier to do the questions.
- ✓ With Writing make sure you don't run out of time. It is tempting to want to write in too much detail early on, but if you do this you may find that you have to rush at the end and miss things out. Allow yourself time to plan, write, check and edit your work. If you do change or correct anything you write, make sure your corrections are clear.
- ✓ With Listening, don't panic if you miss something – you will hear each text a second time. Make sure you use the given time to read the rubric and questions in advance, as it will help you to follow the recordings more easily.
- ✓ With Speaking, be sure to acknowledge and pick up on what the other candidate says. Communicating is all about listening and responding appropriately.



## After the exam – How much do you know about results and next steps?

What should you do after the exam?

### Can you answer these questions?

1. *What can I do with my Cambridge English: Business Higher qualification?*
2. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*
3. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*
4. *What exactly is the online Results Verification Service?*
5. *What will I get if I pass the exam?*
6. *What will I get if I don't quite pass the exam?*
7. *How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: Business Higher?*

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### Results and next steps

#### 1. *What can I do with my Cambridge English: Business Higher qualification?*

Cambridge English exams are recognised by over 15,000 organisations, including universities, companies, ministries, government bodies and professional organisations worldwide. A certificate in this exam can open doors to higher education, improve job prospects and increase international mobility. *Cambridge English: Business Certificates* are also accepted by the UK Home Office for **visa applications**. Find out more about who accepts Cambridge English exams [here](#).

#### 2. *What information will be on my Statement of Results?*

You will see your grade, the marks required to get each grade, and then your own 'candidate profile'. This shows some bands on a grid and indicates whether your performance in each paper was 'Exceptional', 'Good', 'Borderline' or 'Weak'. You do not pass or fail individual papers – you will receive an overall grade based on all four papers.

For more information, see the document **Understanding your Statement of Results**.

#### 3. *How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?*

Statements of Results are released online four to seven weeks after the test for paper-based exams, and two weeks after computer-based exams. To see your results online, you will need your candidate ID number and secret number. These can be found on the Confirmation of Entry sheet given to you by your centre. Successful candidates receive a certificate within three months of the exam, or six weeks for computer-based exams. If you need to check when you will receive your certificate, contact your centre.

#### 4. *What exactly is the online Results Verification Service?*

This service simply enables universities, colleges or employers to view and check exam results. You will need to provide your candidate ID number and secret number.



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### 5. What will I get if I pass the exam?

If you achieve grade B or C in the exam, you will receive the *Business English Certificate Higher* at Level C1. If your performance is exceptional, you will receive the *Business English Certificate Higher* at Level C2.

### 6. What will I get if I don't quite pass the exam?

If your performance is narrowly below Level C1, we will recognise your achievement with a Cambridge English certificate stating that you demonstrated ability at Level B2.

### 7. How can I continue my language learning after passing Cambridge English: Business Higher?

If you are interested in a General English exam aimed at professional people, then *Cambridge English: Proficiency* may give you another option as it is based at Level C2, the highest level on the **CEFR** scale.

There are other possibilities depending on your area of professional expertise. For example, you may wish to take *Cambridge English: Legal* or *Cambridge English: Financial*.



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