

This page describes the oral (speaking) exam for the Cambridge FCE (First Certificate in English) exam.

You usually take the speaking exam together with one other student.

The exam lasts about 14 minutes and has four parts:

(1) Interview (3 minutes)

Each of you will be asked basic questions about your home town, family, work or study, leisure and future plans.

(2) Individual tasks (4 minutes)

Each of you will be asked to compare two colour photographs and explain your personal feelings about them (you will be asked to speak for 1 minute, without any interruption). You will also be asked to give your opinion about the other student's photographs (you will be expected to speak for about 20 seconds).

(3) Joint task (3 minutes)

You will be shown some pictures. You will be asked to discuss these with the other student and to make a decision. Sometimes you will be asked to agree on the conclusion, and sometimes you will be told that you may make different decisions.

(4) Three-way discussion (4 minutes)

You will be asked to discuss (together with the other student and the examiner) some ideas that are connected with the joint task.

Some general advice about

Keep it simple

Try to avoid complicated explanations or grammar if you are not sure about them. If the truthful answer is difficult to explain, you may want to say something easier in the exam.

Ask for explanations

If you don't understand what you are meant to do, ask the examiner to explain. For example, you could say:

Could you repeat the question, please?

I'm sorry, could you explain the meaning of the word ?

Could you please ask the question in another way?

Use full sentences

Avoid answers which are single words or lists

Finish the task

When you are asked to compare and contrast two photos and to give your personal feelings about them, make sure that you leave some time for explaining your own views. If you are asked to reach a conclusion in the joint task, try to do this within the time you are given.

Keep speaking

If you need time to think about something, try to keep speaking rather than remain silent. You could say things such as:

[during the interview; said to the interviewer] *Please give me a moment while I think about the answer*

[at the start of the individual task; talking to yourself] *Let me see ... what do these photographs show?*

[at the start of the joint task; talking to the other student] *Shall we start by describing what we see in the pictures?*

[during the three-way discussion; asking either the examiner or the other student] *What is your opinion?*

To avoid wasting time, make it clear when you have finished talking. For example, say something like:

That's all I can think of at the moment

Practice

Before the exam, practice the test with another student (if you already know the other student who will be taking the speaking test with you, ask him/her to practice with you).

You may find it useful to pay for some private lessons with an English teacher to prepare. If you do this together with a friend then the lesson may be cheaper for you, and you can practice the speaking test in a more realistic way.

SPEAKING: Interview (3 minutes - about 1.5 minutes for each candidate)

The examiner will ask you some short questions about yourself

To prepare for this part of the test, think about short answers to typical questions. Some examples are shown below

Before the interview you will be asked to fill in a sheet giving your first name, family name, home town and country; you should hand this to the interviewer. The interviewer may ask you how to pronounce your name.

Your home town / village

Name: What is the name of your home town (pronounce it in the English way)?

Where is the town located?

Location: Is it near to the capital city or any major cities?

Is it inland or by the coast?

Speciality: Is your town well-known for something (for example, a building or a type of food)?

What is the most interesting part of your town?

Geography: Is it in a flat, hilly or mountainous area?

Does it have a river?

Size: Is it a large or small town?

What is the population?

Type: Do you live in a city centre, a suburb, a town, a village, or in the countryside?

- Industry: What are the main industries?
What kinds of jobs do people do in your town?
- Environment: Is it clean or polluted?
Is it quiet or noisy?
Are there many parks and other green areas?
- Opinion: Do you like living there?
Are there many things to do?
- Comparison: If you are not living in your home town now, what are the main differences
between your current town and your home town?

Your family

- Size: Do you have a large or small family?
- Brothers: Do you have any brothers or sisters?
Are they older or younger than you?
- Parents: Do you live with your parents?
What do they do?
- Pets: Do you have any pets?

Your work or study

- Now: Are you working or studying at the moment?
Can you tell me something about yourself?
- Previous: What were you doing before you started your current work or studies?
- English: Why are you studying English?
Where are you studying?
How long have you been studying English?

Leisure

- Hobbies: What do you like doing in your spare time?
Do you have any hobbies?
- Music: What kind of music do you like?
- Sports: Do you like sports?
- Holidays: How do you like to spend your holidays?
- Reading: Do you enjoy reading?
- Films: What sort of films do you like to watch?
What is your favourite film?

Future plans

- After return: [If you are living in the UK now] What do you plan to do when you return to
your country?

Job: What sort of job would you like to do in the future?
Future life: What do you think you will be doing after 5 or 10 years?
Country: Do you want to live in your home country or abroad?

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SPEAKING: Individual task (4 minutes - about 2 minutes for each candidate)

You will be given two photographs and asked to compare and contrast them, and give your opinion about them.

You will only have one minute to do this. Try to keep talking; avoid any long gaps.

The pictures may show anything, but typically the subject will be: a building, a landscape, a town, a person (or a group of people) doing something

You can keep looking at the photographs while you are talking.

Describing each of the pictures

You might start by giving a brief description of each of the pictures. You do not have to describe them in detail.

If you are not sure what the picture is, use your imagination and say what you think it is. It doesn't matter if you are wrong.

There are different ways in which you can refer to the pictures. For example:

The first picture (referring to the one on the left or on top); the second/other picture (referring to the one on the right or on the bottom)

The picture on the left / the left-hand picture; the picture on the right / the right-hand picture

The top picture / the picture on the top / the upper picture; the bottom picture / the picture at the bottom / the lower picture

After introducing the pictures, you may be able to refer to them using a subject name, for example instead of picture you could say photo or photograph, or you could refer to the

For example:

The first/second picture/photo shows ...

Comparing and contrasting

Liking: I prefer A to B. I like A more than B. I like A, but I dislike B. A is more ... than B

Giving your opinion

In my opinion, ...

For me, ...

I think that ...

Thinking of things to say

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SPEAKING: Joint task (3 minutes)

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SPEAKING: Three-way conversation (4 minutes)

The examiner will ask some questions related to the result of the joint task

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SPEAKING: Example test

This is an example of a possible speaking test for the First Certificate in English exam. There are no right answers for this kind of test. Example conversations are shown because they may give you some useful ideas about how to answer these types of questions. You will not be expected to speak as fluently as Alex and Yuko.

(1): Interview (3 minutes)

Good afternoon. Could I have your mark sheets, please? Thank you.
(the students hand their mark sheets to the examiner)

Examiner: My name is Mark and this is my colleague Susan. She is just going to be listening to us.

So, you are Alex and Yuko?

Alex: That's right.

Yuko: Yes. Actually my name is pronounced Yu-ko.

Examiner: Yu-ko?

Yuko: That's fine.

Examiner: Thank you. First of all we'd like to know something about you, so I'm going to ask some questions about yourselves.

Let's begin with your home town or village, Alex. Where are you from?

Alex: I'm from Geneva, in Switzerland

Examiner: What kind of jobs do people in Geneva do?

Alex: Geneva has many banks, hotels and jewellery shops.
Swiss watches are well-known throughout the world.

Examiner: And where do you come from, Yuko?

Yuko: I'm from Nara, in Japan

Examiner: Can you tell me something about Nara?

Yuko: Nara was once the capital city of Japan.
It contains many old temples and is famous for its deer park.

Examiner: Do you have a large family, Alex?

Alex: Not really. I'm an only child. I live with my parents. We have a cat called Tommy.

Examiner: What about you, Yuko?

Yuko: I have one elder brother and two younger sisters.
I live with my mother and father and one of my grandmothers.
We don't have any pets.

Examiner: How long have you been studying English, Alex?

Alex: I studied English at school between the ages of eleven and sixteen.
I've been studying at a language school in London since September last year.

Examiner: How do you like to spend your holidays, Yuko?

Yuko: I like travelling around Japan with one of my sisters.
I also enjoy watching films and meeting my friends.
My main hobby is playing the violin.

Examiner: What kind of sports do you enjoy, Alex?

Alex: I live close to the Swiss Alps, so I enjoy skiing in the winter.
I also like swimming in the lake in summertime.

Examiner: What do you hope to do in the next few years, Yuko?

Yuko: After I've gone back to Japan I hope to find an office job which uses my English.
After a few years I would like to get married and have children.

(2) Individual tasks (4 minutes)

Thank you. Now I'd like each of you to talk on your own for about a minute.
I'm going to give each of you two different photographs and I'd like you to talk about them.

Examiner: Alex, here are your two photographs. They are pictures of ducks. Please let Yuko have a look at them.



Yuko, I'll give you your photographs in a minute.

Examiner: Alex, I'd like you to compare and contrast these photographs, saying which picture you like better and why.
Remember, you only have about a minute for this so don't worry if I interrupt

you. Alright?

OK. Let me see ... what do these photos show?

Well, both of these photos are pictures of ducks on roads.

The photo on the left shows four ducks crossing a road.

Two of them are white and two of them are brown.

They are walking in line.

A white car has stopped and is waiting for them to move. Maybe there is a long traffic jam.

Alex: (1 minute) The photo on the right shows a brown female duck with her baby ducklings. I think there are six ducklings.

They have found a puddle on the road and they look comfortable there.

I prefer the first picture. The picture reminds me of the cover of a Beatles album, showing the four members of the band crossing a road.

I feel a bit worried for the ducks, because they may be hit by a car.

Both pictures remind me how much humans have changed the environment.

We have built many roads which animals have to cross, and removed many lakes and trees.

Examiner: Thank you, Alex. Yuko, which of these pictures do you prefer?

I like the right-hand picture better.

Yuko: (20 seconds) The ducklings look very sweet, and the mother duck looks proud to be looking after them.

Like Alex, I'm worried that they might be hit by a car.

I hope they can find a proper lake instead of a puddle on a road.

Maybe it is a hot summer and it is difficult to find water.

Thank you.

Examiner: *(the examiner takes back the previous photographs)*

Now, Yuko, here are your two photographs. They show two paths in the English countryside. Please let Alex have a look at them.





Examiner: I'd like you to compare and contrast these photographs, saying how you would feel walking on each of these paths. Remember, Yuko, you have only about a minute for this, so don't worry if I interrupt you. Alright?

I understand.

Let me see. Firstly, I will describe the upper photo.

This shows a path through a forest. It is a well-made path.

On the left-hand side there is a bench where people can rest if they are feeling tired.

In the distance I can see a sign showing which way to go.

Maybe this path is maintained by the local council or by the National Trust.

The lower picture shows a path through a field.

It isn't maintained as well as the other path.

It looks like a road for a farmer's car or tractor, not for people.

Yuko: (1 minute) There aren't so many trees in this picture. There is one tree in the foreground, and some others in the background.

To the right of the path is a field full of yellow flowers. I don't know what kind of plant it is.

The yellow flowers make this picture more colourful than the other one, which is mostly green.

I think both photos were taken in summer, because the sun is shining and the trees and flowers are growing well.

I would prefer to walk on the path shown in the top picture.

It looks more romantic - I want to go there with my boyfriend.

If it is a hot day, there is a lot of shade under the trees and we can sit down on the bench and have a picnic.

Examiner: Thank you, Yuko. Alex, in which place would you prefer to be?

I prefer the place shown in the bottom picture.

Alex: The land is quite flat, so you can see far into the distance.

(20 seconds) My home town is surrounded by mountains, so it is unusual to see that kind of scenery there.

I would like to cycle along that path with my friends.

Examiner: Thank you.

(3) Joint task (3 minutes)

Now, I'd like you to talk about something together for about three minutes. I'm
Examiner: just going to listen.
Here are some pictures suggesting ways you might try to improve your English.



Examiner: Talk to each other about how useful you find each of the ways of studying, and then agree with each other on three that you would both recommend to a friend. You have only about three minutes for this, so, once again, don't worry if I stop you and please speak so that we can hear you. Alright?

Yuko: Alright.

Alex: OK.

Yuko: So, Alex, let's take turns to choose a method of studying. Which way do you like best?

Alex: I think that learning English on a computer is the best way. There is a lot of useful information on the internet.

Yuko: Yes, I agree. We can study at any time by ourselves. But I find English conversation most difficult, so talking to people is good for me.

Alex: Meeting people is enjoyable, too. It's easier to learn English if you can enjoy yourself at the same time.

Yuko: Watching English films is fun, don't you think? Many videos and DVDs have sub-titles, making it easier to understand what is being said.

Alex: Yes, but I think I learn more by watching British television programmes.

Yuko: What sort of programmes do you think are useful for studying English?

Alex: Well, you can improve your listening by watching soap operas. You can hear how people really talk. And you can learn a lot about British culture by watching the news and documentaries.

Yuko: Yes, in Japan I used to watch BBC World, a British news channel on satellite television. You can learn a lot by reading newspapers too, but I don't buy a newspaper very often. What about you?

Alex: I sometimes read the Metro, a free morning newspaper. My host family buys The Times each day, but it is a bit difficult for me to understand.

Yuko: Let's see ... which pictures have we missed? We haven't mentioned books or cassette tapes yet.

Alex: Grammar books and dictionaries are important, aren't they? We can use them to improve our writing and to learn new words.

Yuko: Of course. I think we should make books one of our three recommended methods. Do you agree?

Alex: Yes, let's do that. What about tapes?

Yuko: I sometimes buy tapes with my grammar books or reading books, but they are quite expensive.

Alex: I like listening to British music tapes or CDs, but it is hard to understand the words.

Yuko: You can study the lyrics, but maybe you can't learn so much vocabulary that way.

Alex: I think the pen represents writing letters. I had an English pen-friend when I was in Switzerland. That was a good way of learning English.

Yuko: Yes, but I prefer writing e-mails or using voice mail on the computer. You can get a reply more quickly.

Alex: That's true. I don't write so many letters these days - I use the computer at the internet cafe.

Yuko: I think we've mentioned all of the methods. Let's choose the three we will recommend.

Alex: We both seemed to think computers are useful.

Yuko: Yes, and we agreed that books should be one of our choices.

Alex: So which one shall we choose for the third method? I nominate videos and films.

Yuko: Personally I believe that meeting people is more important. If you have English-speaking friends, you will keep on studying.

Alex: OK. Sometimes it can be difficult to make friends with native English speakers, but knowing how to talk English is important for work or for travel.

Yuko: So shall we make our recommendations?

Alex: Yes, let's do that.

Yuko: I suggest the following. First: computers, second: books, third: talking to people. Do you agree?

Alex: Yes. Computers, books and conversations are all good ways of studying English.

Examiner: Thank you.

(4) Three-way discussion (4 minutes)

- Examiner: Yuko, do you think it is good that computers are being used more commonly in schools?
- Yuko: I think so. People can find a lot of useful information using computers. There are some bad points about them too, though.
- Examiner: What sort of bad points can you think of?
- Yuko: Well, if people spend too much time looking at the computer screen, they may have less time to meet people and they might become less active. In Japan, schoolchildren are putting on weight. They spend so much time studying or playing games on a computer, or watching television.
- Alex: It may not be good for the eyes to look at a TV or computer screen all day. I think that's why more people need to wear glasses or contact lenses.
- Examiner: Do you think there is much difference between writing a letter and sending an e-mail, Alex?
- Alex: Writing a letter using pen and paper takes more time and effort, I think. It isn't so easy to correct mistakes as it is on a computer.
- Examiner: Do you prefer receiving a letter or an e-mail?
- Alex: It's nice to get a letter from someone. My parents write letters to me while I'm living away from home, and I like to receive those very much. But I like to get e-mails from my friends, because I can write back and get a reply quickly. I check every day to see if I have received any e-mails.
- Examiner: What about you, Yuko?
- Yuko: Sorry, could you please repeat your question?
- Examiner: Certainly. I was just asking you whether you prefer to get a letter or an e-mail.
- Yuko: Oh - I prefer getting letters. They are more personal. But these days people are very busy, so it is natural to write e-mails instead.
- Examiner: Do you believe what you read in the newspapers or see on television, Alex?
- Alex: People say we are living in the information age. But you can't trust all the information you receive. Sometimes the stories in newspapers are invented by the journalists, because they know that people want to read about gossip. On television, I think the quality of programmes is getting worse. There are more and more channels.
- Examiner: Do you believe what you read on the internet, Yuko?
- Yuko: Anyone can put information on the internet, so you can't trust it completely. You have to be careful.
- Examiner: Do you think English is taught well in your home country, Yuko?
- Yuko: I think that the English teachers in Japan concentrate on grammar too much. We don't have much opportunity to practice speaking. The class size is very large - often there are 40 students or more. Recently the government has encouraged young native English teachers to come to Japan, but it is difficult for them because they aren't trained teachers and they can't speak Japanese. How well is English taught in Switzerland, Alex?

- I think it is easier for us to learn English in Switzerland. There are four languages spoken in different parts of the country, so learning languages is important for us.
- Alex: There are many tourists and business people who speak English, so we can practice outside of the school sometimes. But the best way to learn English is to visit an English-speaking country.
- Yuko: Yes, I agree. My speaking and listening skills have improved a lot since I came to England to study.
- Examiner: Thank you. That is the end of the test.

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