

Level Test and Level Test (3 Skills)

Test Specification and
Validation Report



Place

Introduction

Level Test: An overview

The Pearson English Level Test is an online adaptive test of English language proficiency developed to provide teachers with information that will help them stream students and place them in the right class.

The test measures a student's English language competency and reports a CEFR score from pre-A1 to C2, together with a GSE score range between 10 and 90. It also presents a high-level view of a student's performance across multiple skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking). There are two versions of the test – one that tests writing, reading and listening (together with the enabling skills Grammar and Vocabulary) and another that tests the same skills plus Speaking.

The score report is provides the overall test result, with high-level skill ratings and performance summaries. Reporting is designed for teachers to place prospective students into classes, and results can be reported at both the group and individual level.

The test is delivered through the proficiency assessment portal, Pearson English Test Hub, which also stores and displays the results of the test.

The purpose of the test

The test provides information to a teacher about the level of general English proficiency of the prospective student so that they can be placed in the best level to start their course. It also provides a skills profile, highlighting the student's strengths and weaknesses.

Who is it for?

The test is designed for students who are 14 or older. It is not Junior or Primary focussed, or designed to assess English for specific purposes (e.g. business). It can be used before any adult or upper secondary course.

Why take an integrated skills test?

A number of the questions on the test are integrated skills questions. These questions test more than one skill at the same time.

Using integrated skills questions means that Level Test is a better test of a learner's English. In real life and in the classroom learners use more than one skill to complete communicative tasks. To order something in a restaurant we need to listen and speak, to take notes in a classroom we need to listen and write. Integrated skills questions test how well learners can use the skills they have learnt and practised in the classroom and used in real life.

Test design

Level Test is a computer-based test normally taken on school premises, however it can be taken at home if the test taker has access to a computer with headset and microphone (if taking the 4 skills version). Each administration takes 20-30 minutes and the results are available within minutes.

Level Test employs an adaptive method to select questions to present to the student. The test uses an adaptive algorithm which takes a student's answers to a previous question to select the most suitable question to present next. It selects these items from a large item bank making each student's experience different. The adaptive nature of the test allows Level Test to quickly and accurately estimate a student's English proficiency.

The content of the test is very closely linked to the Pearson GSE scale, which guides content production at every level. To aid with this linking, each question is tagged with a GSE score and a GSE can-do statement.

Test development

The questions in Level Test are based on those developed for the Benchmark Test and have been developed by international teams of experienced writers. Teams were based in the UK, Australia, the USA and Hong Kong.

Once written, all questions are reviewed by the teams in the different countries. Comments and suggestions for improvement are stored with the test questions on a secure database. The questions then go through a further review by an expert panel and decisions are made on the quality of the questions; which to keep and which to reject. All questions are then thoroughly checked by Pearson staff and images and high quality recordings are added to complete the questions before they go forward to be calibrated in a large scale field test.

After the field testing, further checks are made on item quality based on the measurement characteristics of the questions. Questions are eliminated from the item pool if they are too easy or too difficult, if weaker learners get them right but stronger learners get them wrong, or if they show any bias. These checks then result in a bank of the best quality questions. Questions are selected from this bank to go into the final tests.

Automated scoring validation process

From the field test data, 300 candidates were randomly selected as the validation data set. A validation data set is a group of candidates whose data are segregated out prior to statistical analysis in order to independently test how well automated scoring models work, once they are complete. Additionally, these candidates' data were not included in the psychometric item calibration, or in the scaling onto the GSE. If the test scores for these candidates as calculated by both automated and human scoring models are highly correlated, this provides evidence that the automated scoring models will work as expected for other new candidates in the operational setting.

Once the automated scoring system was developed, the responses from the validation set were run through the same psychometric model to produce overall and sub-skill scores for each candidate. Those human and machine scores were then correlated to compare how similar those two kinds of scores are for each person. When candidates were identified as having extreme scores (i.e. well outside the reported score range of the GSE and not well estimated), or when they had fewer than five responses which were able to be scored in a particular skill area, their scores were excluded from the analyses. This reduced the number of candidates for the Overall score correlation to 288. The results of the analysis show there is a very strong relationship between machine and human Overall scores, with a correlation of .97.

Alignment to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

Level test is aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels in a number of ways:

- Question writers are experienced teachers and authors who were also trained on the CEFR levels.
- Questions were written to specific CEFR levels using 'can do' statements taken from the CEFR documents.
- Many learners who took the Field Test were studying at levels which had been previously linked to CEF levels in a comprehensive academic study.

- Learners' responses in the Field Test were independently rated by examiners trained on the CEFR levels to check they were at the right level of proficiency.

In the following table, we define how the Global Scale of English is related to the CEFR levels. To give an impression of what the levels mean, i.e., what learners at particular levels can do, we use the summary descriptors published in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24) where they exist.

Global Scale of English	CEFR band	Description
GSE 10-21	<A1	<p>This level of proficiency is likened to a tourist who may know some individual words but does not have enough control of language to produce full sentences and mostly communicates with words or very basic phrases.</p> <p>The words they do know may carry a lot of communicative meaning or be effective when used with hand gestures or when the context is very clear (e.g. pointing to an object in a shop).</p>
GSE 22-29	A1	<p>Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.</p> <p>Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has.</p> <p>Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</p>
GSE 30-35 and 36-42	A2 A2+	<p>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).</p> <p>Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.</p> <p>Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.</p>
GSE 36-42 and 43-58	B1 B1+	<p>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.</p> <p>Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.</p> <p>Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.</p> <p>Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p>
GSE 59-66 and 67-75	B2 B2+	<p>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.</p> <p>Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.</p> <p>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.</p>
GSE 76-84	C1	<p>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning.</p> <p>Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.</p> <p>Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.</p>

		Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
GSE 85-90	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.

Test Coverage

The 3 skill test covers three skills; Reading, Listening, Writing, as well as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The 4 skill test tests speaking skills after the adaptive section of the test.

Skills or Knowledge	Test Focus
Reading	To demonstrate reading skills, learners will be asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read and understand the main points from signs, newspapers and magazines • understand the detail of short texts • understand the detail in longer texts
Listening	To demonstrate listening skills, learners will be asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen for specific information in listening texts • follow and understand short texts and show understanding by writing down what was said
Writing	To demonstrate writing skills, learners will be asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write accurately what they hear using correct sentence structure, word order and connectors.
Speaking (4-Skill test only)	To demonstrate speaking skills, learners will be asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speak clearly using appropriate stress and intonation • pronounce words so that they can be understood • describe pictures or other visual material connecting ideas together accurately and with a range of language
Grammar	To demonstrate knowledge of grammar , learners will be asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose the right word or phrase to make an accurate sentence • understand the difference between different grammatical tenses and other structures
Vocabulary	To demonstrate knowledge of vocabulary , learners will be asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produce words which relate to common themes and topics such as family, work and social situations • use appropriate words in different contexts • show an understanding of the different meaning of words and how they relate to other words

Test Questions

What kinds of questions are in the test and what do they measure?

The test has a number of different question types. This gives learners a chance to demonstrate their English skills in different ways. There are questions where learners choose the correct option or where they write the answer to an open question. There are questions where the learner repeats or copies what has been said as well as questions where learners describe something.

Because Level Test is adaptive, different students will see different questions and may not be presented with all the question types described below.

The 3 skills version of the test takes 20 minutes to complete, and the 4 skill version takes 30 minutes.

Item Type	What do the learners have to do?	What is being tested?	Skill(s)	3 Skill test	4 Skill test
Fill in the table	This question asks the learner to complete a set of vocabulary items with appropriate words. The words are presented as a table of related words.	This question tests the vocabulary knowledge of the learner. It tests the words the learner knows and the accuracy of the form of the word. It tests the learner's knowledge of word families and related sets of words that they may have met in the classroom or when learning English.	Vocabulary		
Choose the right word or phrase	This question asks the learner to choose the correct word to complete a number of sentences. The sentences are related by a similar theme.	This question tests the vocabulary knowledge of the learner in a written context. It tests the vocabulary the learner knows and whether they can understand the use of the vocabulary in the context of a sentence. It tests the range of vocabulary the learner knows.	Vocabulary		
Complete the Dialogue	This question asks the learner to select words from a word bank to complete a dialogue.	This question tests the vocabulary of the learner in a spoken context. It tests the vocabulary the learner knows and whether they can understand the use of the vocabulary in the context of a conversation. It tests the range of vocabulary the learner knows.	Vocabulary		
Choose the right word or phrase	This question asks the learner to choose the correct word or phrase to complete a number of sentences. The sentences are related by a similar theme.	This question tests the knowledge of grammar of the learner. It tests the range of grammatical knowledge as well as the accuracy of grammar in a written context.	Grammar		
Multiple Answer Multiple Choice	This question asks the learner to choose the correct word to complete a number of sentences. The sentences are related by a similar theme.	This question tests the knowledge of grammar of the learner in a written context and whether they can choose the right grammatical form in a sentence.	Grammar		

Drag and drop	This question asks the learner to re-order a sentence correctly.	This question tests the grammatical knowledge of the learner at sentence level. It tests word order, connectors and discourse markers. It tests grammatical knowledge in a written context.	Grammar		
Error correction	This question asks the learner to select one of the available options to correct the mistake in the sentence.	This question tests knowledge of grammatical rules in use.	Grammar		
Choose the right word or phrase (gapfill)	This question asks learners to read a short text and select the best word or phrase to complete the text	This question tests the global understanding of short messages, notes and short pieces of writing.	Reading		
Graphical multiple choice	This question asks learners to read a short text and select the best picture to match with the text.	This question tests the global understanding of short messages, notes and short pieces of writing.	Reading		
Short answer questions	This question asks the learner to read a longer text and answer questions on the text	This question tests the reading comprehension of the learner. It tests specific information included in the text.	Reading		
Listen and write (Dictation)	This question asks the learner to listen to a sentence or short text and write what they have heard.	This question tests listening comprehension at the word and sentence level. It tests the ability to write accurately and understand sentence structure, word order and connectors.	Listening Writing		
Listen and read (Hotspots)	This question asks the learner to read a text and at the same time listen to the text. The learner has to find the differences between the written text and the spoken text.	This question tests reading and listening comprehension. It tests the ability to recognise individual words in a text.	Listening Reading		
Read aloud	This question asks the learner to read aloud a sentence or short text.	This question tests accurate pronunciation and how fluent the learner is at speaking. It tests if the words in the text are understood and repeated accurately.	Speaking Reading		
Listen and repeat	This question asks the learner to listen to a sentence or short text and then repeat it.	This question tests listening comprehension at the word and sentence level. It tests pronunciation and fluency. It tests if the words heard are understood and repeated accurately.	Speaking Listening		

Describe a picture	This question asks the learner to look at a photograph or picture and describe what they see.	This question tests the learner's ability to speak in an extended way linking concepts and ideas. It tests the accuracy of speech including accurate grammar, pronunciation and stress as well as the fluency of the speech. It tests the use of appropriate words to describe the photograph or picture.	Speaking		
Listen to a conversation	This question asks the learner to listen to a short conversation and then answer a question about the conversation.	This question tests listening comprehension. It tests the accuracy of the listening comprehension of the learner.	Listening Speaking		
Story retell	This question asks the learner to listen to a short narrative and then retell the narrative using their own words.	This question tests listening and speaking. It assesses understanding of a short narrative.	Speaking		

Reporting

The test reports half CEFR bands from <A1 to C2 with the corresponding GSE range. Sub skills are reported using a short performance summary and a 3-step rating system (above, at, or below level) to provide a high level view of performance, and indicate stronger or weaker skill areas. This skills profile can be used by teachers to help tailor the course content and focus on the needs of their students.

Skill scores (listening, reading, speaking, writing) are based on test items that assess those particular skills, either as a single skill or integrated skill tasks.

The Level Test result can also be used to assign the appropriate Benchmark Test once they have been assigned to a class.

Level Test results can be provided at the individual or group level, depending on the needs of the school and teacher.

Detailed information about results is provided in the Level Test user guide.