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Information for candidates

Cambridge

A2 Key

English Qualifications





Contents

- How to use this guide 4
- About the exam 5
- Preparing for the exam 6
- Paper 1: Reading and Writing 7
- Paper 2: Listening 13
- Paper 3: Speaking 17
- Taking the exam 20
- Top tips for exam day 21
- After the exam 22
- Getting your results and certificate 22
- Next steps in your learning journey 23

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You can now get a Cambridge English Qualification in a faster, flexible way.

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cambridgeenglish.org/qualifications-digital



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.

You can navigate the document by using the buttons on each spread:

Previous page Next page First page Previous view

How to use this guide

Cambridge **A2 Key**
English Qualifications



This guide is designed to help you on each step of your learning journey. There's information and advice for how to prepare before the exam, what to expect in the exam and what will happen after the exam.



This guide also includes lots of helpful boxes with **i key information and advice**, **★ study tips** and **? questions** which people often ask about the exam:

i It's important that you understand what you need to do in each part of the exam and follow all the instructions carefully.

★ Practice tests are useful but they are only one part of your preparation. You also need to practise your general language and communication skills.

? Where can I find practice tests?
You can find **official exam preparation materials** online and in bookshops, including coursebooks and practice. There are also **free sample tests** on the Cambridge English website.
You can find a **tutorial** for the digital test on our website.

Read these tips carefully – they will help you to feel well prepared for the exam and to avoid common mistakes or problems.
And ... **good luck with your exam!**

About the exam

- A2 Key is a qualification for learners who have a basic level of English. The exam:
- ✓ tests your knowledge and ability in English at Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
 - ✓ is designed to show your ability to use English to communicate in simple situations
 - ✓ is accepted by thousands of institutions and employers around the world as evidence of your abilities in spoken and written English
 - ✓ is based on extensive research to make sure that each paper is the right length and the right level, so your exam result will reflect your abilities fairly and accurately
 - ✓ can be taken in digital or paper-based formats.

The exam has three papers. Each one is equally important.

1. Reading & Writing
This paper shows that you can understand simple written information such as signs, brochures, newspapers and magazines.

2. Listening
This paper shows that you can understand announcements and other spoken material when people speak slowly.

3. Speaking
This paper shows that you can take part in a conversation by answering and asking simple questions.

Your combined scores for Paper 1 + Paper 2 + Paper 3 = your exam result!

? Do I need to pass all three papers?
No, it's possible to pass the exam if you do well in some papers but not in every paper. For example, if you do very well in Reading and Writing and Listening, but you don't do very well in Speaking, it's still possible to pass the exam.

What's the difference between taking the exam digitally or on paper?
The content of the exams is the same, the scoring is the same and the final certificate is the same. Cambridge English offers different versions of the exam just so you have more choice and flexibility in how you take it.

Preparing for the exam

A successful and enjoyable journey begins with good preparation. For A2 Key, this means you should:

- practise your English in all four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking
- improve your grammar and vocabulary for communication at A2 level
- understand how the exam is organised and assessed
- understand what will happen on exam day.

Keep reading to find out more about how you can prepare for each paper in the A2 Key exam.

Is there a wordlist for this exam?

Yes! You can find the wordlist online for A2 Key. This list provides some useful words that you can prepare to use, or just to understand, in the exam.

How is the digital exam different from the paper-based exam?

On the Cambridge website, you'll find more information about the digital exam and a guide to common questions and answers about this exam format.

Follow time limits when you do practice tests. This will help you prepare for the real exam, when you will have limited time to complete the tasks and fill in the answer sheet. (And remember: if you have extra time at the end of the Reading and Writing paper, you can go back to a task and look at it again.)

Self-study is very important when preparing for an exam, because sometimes you don't have a teacher or a book to help you. Try these ways to make your learning journey more personal:

- Write interesting and useful vocabulary in a notebook. Include the meaning, the pronunciation, an example sentence and a translation in your first language.
- Think about your learning goals: why are you studying for this exam? If you pass the exam, what will this qualification help you do in future?
- Don't be afraid to use English outside class with other English speakers in everyday situations. For example, you could tell a family member, classmate or friend about your day or post a comment in English in response to something on social media.

Paper 1: Reading and Writing

60 mins 7 parts 32 questions	Part 1	Read 6 short texts and understand the main message of each text.
	Part 2	Read 7 questions and 3 short texts on the same topic, then match the questions to the texts.
	Part 3	Read 1 long text and answer 5 multiple-choice questions.
	Part 4	Read 1 text with 6 gaps. You must choose the correct word for each gap.
	Part 5	Read 1 text with 6 gaps. You must write 1 word in each gap.
	Part 6	Write a short text (25 words or more) using information in the task.
	Part 7	Write a short story (35 words or more) using 3 pictures.

To improve your **writing skills**, it's important to learn how to do things in your writing like giving information, inviting, suggesting, thanking and apologising. To practise these in realistic ways, you could write short messages or emails to friends, family or colleagues, and ask them to write back to you. You can also practise writing in English with our online tool, Write & Improve.

To improve your **reading skills**, it's important to read different types of text which you really enjoy. If you have a special interest or hobby, try reading about it in English. You can read anything: blogs, books, magazine articles, social media, etc. You can also find fiction and non-fiction graded readers in English (books which are written for people who are learning English).





The Reading and Writing paper tests different ways of reading and writing.

To practise **reading** for the A2 Key exam:

- Try to read a text quickly to get the main idea before you read it in more detail.
- Read a text to find out specific information. For example, visit a cinema website to find out the times of a film.
- Read some texts carefully, so that you understand as much as possible.
- If you don't know a word, try to guess its meaning without using a dictionary.

To practise **writing** for the A2 Key exam:

- Practise writing messages that are at least 25 words (Part 6 of the test), so that you know what this number of words looks like.
- Find pictures in a coursebook or online which make a story (Part 7 of the test). Tell the story first, then write it. Write at least 35 words, so that you know what this number of words looks like.
- Look at model answers in coursebooks to see what good answers at A2 level are like.
- Practise writing with the same time limit as in the exam.
- If you're going to take the digital exam, practise typing your answers on a keyboard and editing your work on-screen.
- Always check your writing for spelling, grammar and vocabulary mistakes.



There are many different types of **reading text** in the exam: signs, notices, packaging information, short newspaper and magazine articles, notes, text messages, emails, etc. Before you take the exam, it's important that you have seen these kinds of text before and that you know how to do the kind of tasks which appear in the exam.

In the **writing** tasks, make sure you write about all three questions in the message (Part 6 of the test) and all three pictures (Part 7 of the test). Also make sure your writing is in a logical order and that your sentences are connected to each other. The examiners look at these when marking your writing.

Extra help online

You can find **a sample test and other self-study materials** on our website. Both of these can help you to practise different parts of the Reading and Writing paper.

Some common questions about Paper 1: Reading and Writing



In the digital exam, can I see all the text and questions at the same time?

You might have to scroll up and down to read the whole text and see all the questions in the digital exam paper.



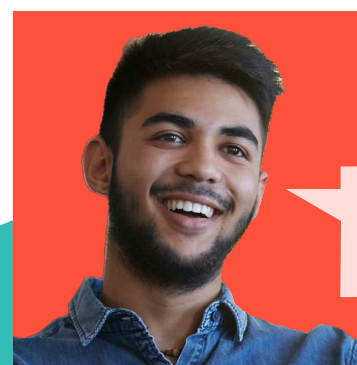
What if I don't understand all the words in a reading text?

Just continue reading and try to understand as much as possible. Use the context to help you. In the exam, you can't ask what a word means nor use a dictionary, so it's important to be able to read without stopping to look up all the words.



Will I lose marks for incorrect answers?

No. A correct answer gets 1 mark, an incorrect answer gets 0 marks and no answer gets 0 marks. So if you're not sure about an answer, it is best to guess something!



Is there a spell-checker in the digital test?

No! It is important to check your own answers and spelling before the end of the test.



Can I plan and make notes for the Writing tasks?

Yes, your exam centre will give you paper that you can use to plan and make notes for the Writing tasks.



Do ...

- ✓ Look carefully at the **instructions** for each part.
- ✓ Look at the **titles** of the longer texts. The titles will help you to understand what the text is about and where it comes from.
- ✓ Read the texts and the questions carefully **before** you try to answer a question.
- ✓ **Answer all the questions**, even if you're not sure. Always choose an answer for each multiple-choice question.
- ✓ Write at **least** the minimum number of words – 25 words in Part 6 and 35 words in Part 7.
- ✓ Use a **range of vocabulary** in the Writing tasks, even if you are not completely sure about the correct spelling.
- ✓ Use the tools in the digital test, such as **highlighting** and **taking notes**, to help you.

Don't ...

- ✗ Don't choose an answer just because you see one word! **Read all the options carefully** first.
- ✗ Don't worry if you don't know the meaning of a word in a reading text. Try to **guess** what it means.
- ✗ Don't spend **too much time** on one part of the test and don't forget to **practise** doing the whole Reading and Writing test within the time limit.
- ✗ **Don't write an answer which you memorised** before the exam. You must write something which responds to the instructions and information which are given in the test.

If you're taking the test on paper ...

Do ...

- ✓ Check that you have written your answers in **the correct place** on the answer sheet.
- ✓ Make sure that you transfer your answers in the Reading section to the answer sheet **accurately and clearly**, because it will be scanned into a computer.
- ✓ **Write clearly** so your answers are easy to read. However, it is not important if you write in CAPITALS or lower case, or if your writing is joined up or not.
- ✓ If you want to **change** an answer, use an **eraser** to rub it out. Make sure your changes are **clear** and easy to read.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pen** on the answer sheet. Use a pencil. It's easier to correct answers if you change your mind, and the marking machine can't read answers that are written in pen.
- ✗ Don't write **more than one answer** for any question, even if you think there are two possible answers.
- ✗ Don't worry if you need **more paper** – just raise your hand to ask the examiner and remember at the end of the exam to leave all the paper you used. This includes your final answer sheet, the question paper and any notes which you made to plan or prepare your answer.



Paper 2: Listening

About 30 minutes 5 parts 25 questions	Part 1	Listen to 5 short recordings, each with just 1 or 2 people speaking. For each recording, choose the correct image from 3 options.
	Part 2	Listen to 1 person speaking and complete 5 gaps in a written text with 1 or 2 words or a number or a date or a time.
	Part 3	Listen to 2 people speaking together and answer 5 multiple-choice questions.
	Part 4	Listen to 5 short recordings, each with just 1 person speaking. For each recording, choose the correct answer from 3 options.
	Part 5	Listen to 2 people speaking and match 5 items.



In the paper-based exam, you will have 6 minutes after the recordings finish to transfer your answers to the answer sheet. Make sure you write them in the correct place!

In the exam, always read the questions before you start listening. Don't worry if you miss a question – use the questions to help you find your place. You will hear each recording twice.

Extra help online

Try the [sample listening tests](#) on our website.

Try the [extra practice activities](#) on our website.



Practise saying the letters of the alphabet and long numbers, such as telephone numbers and dates. This will help you recognise them when you're listening.

Try listening to people speaking as much as you can, even if you can't understand everything. Listen to people speaking in different accents, as you may hear different accents in the test. You can find many different things to listen to online, including podcasts or radio or TV programmes from different countries around the world. You might find it easier to watch videos so that you can see the person speaking while you're listening.

To improve your listening skills, it's important to listen to many different things in your free time which you really enjoy. You can find lots of interesting video and audio online, like podcasts, talks, radio stations, audiobooks and so on. Many of these have subtitles or transcripts so you can read and listen at the same time. The important thing is just to listen in English as much as possible and to enjoy it!

Some common questions about Paper 2: Listening



How many times will I hear each recording?

You will hear each recording **two times**.



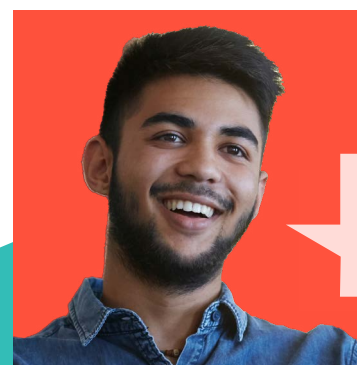
Can I pause the recording?

No, you cannot pause the recording during the Listening test.



I have hearing difficulties. Could I lose marks because of this?

No. You or your teacher must contact your **Cambridge test centre to make special arrangements**.



How important is spelling in Part 2?

It's OK to make some small spelling mistakes in the Listening paper of this exam, but it must be clear what you were trying to write. If the word is very common (for example, *Monday*) or if the recording gives a word letter by letter (for example, a person's name), then you must spell this correctly.



What if I can't hear the recording?

In the **digital** test, you wear headphones and can change the volume at any time during the test.

In the **paper-based** exam, if you can't hear the recording, raise your hand immediately so somebody can quickly help to fix the problem.



Do ...

- ✓ Listen to **all** the instructions in the test – and read them too! It's really important to understand what you're listening for and what you have to do.
- ✓ Look at the **questions, text and pictures** and think about what kind of information you are going to hear.
- ✓ While you listen, **use the information on the screen to help you follow** the recording.
- ✓ Try to answer the questions when the recording is played the **first** time. Then you can check these answers when you hear the recording for the **second** time.
- ✓ Answer **all** the questions, even if you're not sure.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't panic** if you don't understand everything that you hear – you can probably understand a lot even if you don't understand every word.
- ✗ Don't spend **too much time** thinking about a difficult question. You might miss the next one!
- ✗ **Don't rush** to choose an answer for Part 1 just because you heard **one word or phrase**. You need to concentrate on the general meaning.

If you're taking the test on paper...

Do ...

- ✓ Write all your answers on a **separate answer sheet**. While you're listening, you can write on the question paper; but you must transfer your answers to the answer sheet. You will have 6 minutes at the end of the test to do this.

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't use a pen on the answer sheet. Use a pencil.** It's easier to correct answers if you change your mind, and the marking machine can't read answers that are written in pen. Use an eraser if you make a mistake and want to change an answer.



Paper 3: Speaking

Candidates are tested together in pairs or groups of three. If there are three candidates together, the test lasts longer so each candidate gets enough time to speak.

About 8–10 minutes 2 parts	Part 1	Each candidate has a short general conversation (about 3–4 minutes) with the examiner. You will need to give basic factual or personal information.
	Part 2	The candidates speak together for about 5–6 minutes about some pictures on a specific topic. You will need to discuss your likes and dislikes, and give reasons.

**Extra help online**
Watch an example of a Speaking test video and read the examiners' commentary in the Exam Essentials on our webpage.



If you don't know about a topic in the Speaking paper, do **not** speak about something else! You need to show your language skills, not your knowledge about a specific subject. Before the exam, think about how you could:

- say that you don't know a lot about a topic.
- describe what a friend or someone from your family might say about the topic instead.

The best way to improve your speaking is to speak as much English as you can! In the exam, you need to be able to:

- answer questions about yourself.
- discuss a topic with someone else, looking at a picture.
- talk about things which you like and don't like, and give reasons.

Try to practise doing these things with your friends, family, colleagues and teacher. Remember to say more than just one or two words. You should also practise asking questions to find out what other people think.

Some common questions about Paper 3: Speaking



Can I do the Speaking test with another student from my class?

Ask your exam centre. Different exam centres have different rules about this. But it doesn't matter if you already know your partner for the Speaking test. Some people might feel more relaxed and confident, but other people may find this situation difficult. The examiners are trained to give all candidates equal opportunities to do their best.



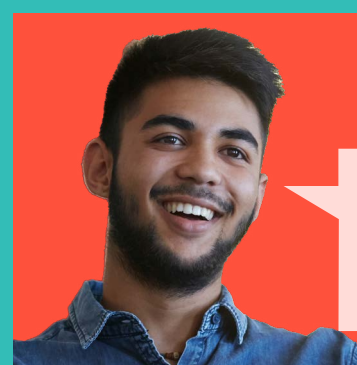
What if my partner for the Speaking test has better speaking skills or a very different personality?

Don't worry. Examiners are specially trained for situations where candidates have different abilities or personalities. Everyone will have the chance to show their best speaking skills in the test.



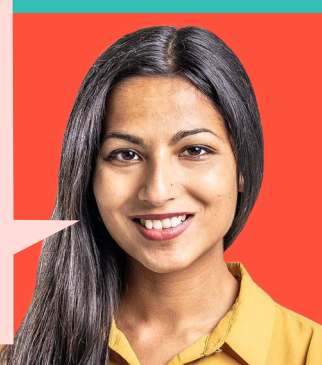
How is the Speaking test done in the digital exam?

It's the same as the paper-based exam. You take the Speaking test together with one or two other candidates, and there are two examiners.



Why are there two examiners for the Speaking test?

The two examiners are doing different jobs. One person is an **interlocutor**, which means they speak to you and manage the test. The other person is an **assessor**, who only listens and does not participate in the test. Together, the interlocutor and the assessor decide how well you performed.



Do ...

- ✓ **Speak clearly** so that both examiners can hear you.
- ✓ **Always try to answer** the questions. The examiners can't mark you if you don't say anything.
- ✓ Try to answer the examiner's questions with **more than just one word**.
- ✓ **Listen to your partner** and to the examiners when it is their turn to speak.
- ✓ Ask the examiner to **repeat the question or instructions** if you don't understand.
- ✓ Try to **relax and enjoy the test**. Remember that the examiners want you to do your best!

Don't ...

- ✗ **Don't prepare long answers in advance**, and don't simply learn and practise a speech. You must answer the question which the examiner asks you in the test.
- ✗ Don't talk at the same time as your partner or **interrupt** them when they are speaking.
- ✗ Don't worry if you think you've made a **mistake**. The important thing is that you communicate with your partner and with the examiner.
- ✗ Don't worry **if the examiner interrupts you** when you are still speaking. This shows that you have spoken enough. Part of the examiner's job is to control the time limits of the test.

Taking the exam

Even after lots of preparation, many people still feel nervous on exam day. That's why it's really important to feel ready and to know what to expect. Watch the **What to expect on exam day** video.



Before exam day, you should:

- ✓ **Register for the exam.** If you are preparing for the exam as part of a course at a school, your school will register you. If you are studying independently, you can **look online to find a centre that offers the exam** and register directly with them. They will give you advice about preparation and tell you how much your exam will cost.
- ✓ **Check the date, time and address** of your exam. Your centre will send you this information.
- ✓ **Sign up for our free online results service.** The fastest way to get your results is to register with our **Results Service for Candidates**. When you register for the exam, you'll be given your Candidate ID Number and your Secret Number. You'll need these details to register to receive your results online.
- ✓ **Check that you know where the exam is happening and how to get there**, because you must arrive **before** the exam starts.



You should register with our free **Results Service for Candidates** a few weeks before your exam.



Can I choose to take different exam papers on different days?

No, the Speaking test is the only paper which usually happens on a different day. All the other papers must be taken together on the same day.

Do I need to bring anything with me on exam day?

Yes, you should bring:

1. Identification (for example, your passport or national ID card). It must be the original document with your photo and it must be valid on the day of your exam.
2. Pens (black or dark blue).
3. Pencils (B or HB) and an eraser.
4. A clear plastic bottle of water.

Your exam centre will have extra pens and pencils if you need them.

You **cannot** bring your mobile phone or other electronic items (for example, digital watches) inside the exam room. Your exam centre can tell you if you should leave these at home or if they can keep them somewhere safe during the exam.



Top tips for exam day

- ✓ In the Reading and Writing paper, **you can do the tasks in any order**, so you might want to start with the questions which you find easier. If you're taking the paper-based exam, just make sure that you write your answers in the correct order on the answer sheet!
- ✓ It's important to have enough energy when you're taking an exam. Before exam day, check with your exam centre if it's possible to buy food and drink there. **If not, you might want to bring something to eat.** You can't bring food to your desk, but you can eat it during breaks.
- ✓ Check you know **what you can and can't do in the exam room**. For example, you can't bring food to your desk with you but you can bring a clear plastic bottle of water. All of this information is in the **Summary Regulations**, which you can read online before exam day. Your exam centre will also provide a copy of these rules.
- ✓ There will be a clock or timer on the screen (or in the exam room if you're taking the paper-based test). Remember to **use the time well**. **Try not to panic** and look at the clock every few minutes!
- ✓ **Follow all instructions carefully.** In the digital exam, the instructions will be on your screen. In the paper-based exam, they will be on the exam paper. If you have any questions, if you need help or if you want to leave the room, raise your hand to ask the invigilator (the person who helps manage the exams).
- ✓ Your exam centre will **take your photo**. They might also make a note of your **passport or ID number**. These steps are very important if you want to use your exam result in future for immigration or higher education.
- ✓ Finally... try to **sleep well the night before** your exam!



During the exam, you must not talk to other people or try to see what they are writing or typing.

At the end of the paper-based exam, the invigilator will tell you to stop writing and you must stop **immediately**. Then you must give them all your papers, including the question papers, answer sheets and any notes which you took, and wait in your seat. The invigilator will tell you when you can leave the room.



After the exam

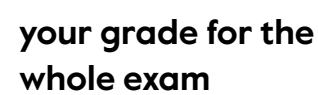
Well done! You prepared, you took the exam and now you're just waiting for your results. So what happens now?

Getting your results and certificate

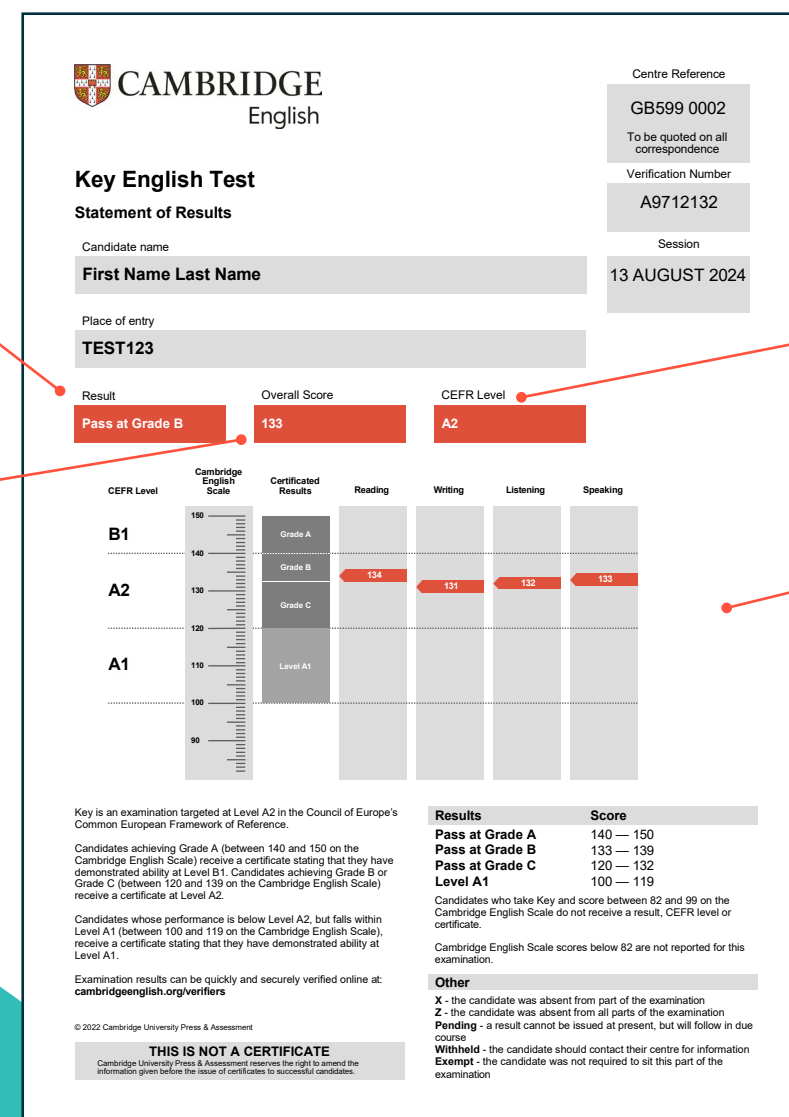
All candidates receive a **Statement of Results**. You can access this [online](#). If you are successful in the exam, you will also receive a **certificate**. Both of these documents will be sent to your exam centre.

	Digital exam	Paper-based exam
Statement of Results	1–2 weeks after the exam	4–6 weeks after the exam
Certificate	3–4 weeks after the exam	7–9 weeks after the exam

Your Statement of Results will look like this:



your score on the Cambridge English Scale for the whole exam (this is called the 'overall score')



the CEFR level (A2)
of the whole exam

your score on the Cambridge English Scale for each of the four skills (reading and writing, listening and speaking)



What does my 'overall score' mean?

Your overall score uses the Cambridge English scale to show how well you did in the exam.

If you score ...	You will receive ...	Your certificate will show ...
140 or more (grade A)	a certificate for A2 Key	...that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level B1.
120–139 (grade B or C)	a certificate for A2 Key	...that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level A2.
100–119	a certificate from Cambridge English	...that you demonstrated ability at CEFR Level A1.
99 or below	You will not receive a certificate, but you will receive a Statement of Results.	

What happens if I don't pass one of the papers?

You can't fail a paper. Your overall score is based on the whole exam, so it's possible to pass the exam even if you don't do very well in one paper. Your Statement of Results will show your overall score and your scores for the different parts of the exam.

How can I receive my results online?

You'll need your Candidate ID Number and Secret Number to register with the **Results Service for Candidates**. You can find these numbers on the Confirmation of Entry document from your exam centre.

How can a university, college or employer check my exam results?

They can use the online **Results Verification Service**. You will need to give them your Candidate ID Number and Secret Number. If you've lost these numbers, the centre where you took your exam can provide them.



If you do not want to prepare for another exam but you want to continue developing and improving your English, there are many things you could do. For example:

- Continue to read and listen to things in English which interest you, for example novels, television shows, blogs or podcasts.
- Join a club or project which involves reading (like a book club) or writing (like a Facebook group where members post their own short stories).
- Continue to keep vocabulary notes. Add any interesting or useful words and phrases which you learn from the things you read and listen to in English.

Next steps in your learning journey

With your A2 Key qualification, you could:

- **Begin a course of higher education.** Cambridge English exams are **officially accepted by thousands of colleges and universities globally.**
- **Travel, study or work abroad.** Because the Cambridge exams are so well known all around the world, they can give you opportunities in other countries.
- **Prepare for the next level: B1 Preliminary.** The B1 Preliminary qualification shows that you have mastered the basics of English and now have practical language skills for everyday use.



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Find out more at
cambridge.org/english

We believe that English can unlock a lifetime of experiences and, together with teachers and our partners, we help people to learn and confidently prove their skills to the world.

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