

Comparing English language proficiency tests with the Oxford Test of English

May 2021

Comparing English language proficiency tests

A common question students ask is 'how does my score compare with other tests?' This is not an easy question to answer. Different tests are developed by different testing organisations, so scores on one test cannot be interpreted as directly equivalent to scores on other tests. Different tests have different designs, test methods, and may have a different understanding of language proficiency, even if the tests are used for similar purposes (e.g. university admission). Some candidates may perform better in different language tasks (e.g. Speaking vs. Writing), so performance on different tests may vary by individual test taker depending on their individual strengths and weaknesses, or preference for specific types of task. Therefore, it is very difficult to give exact comparisons across different tests.

While alignment studies are possible, this requires gathering extensive test data from multiple testing organisations. Several studies of this type have been conducted. Additionally, different tests have also been mapped to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). This is a widely-used standards document from which scores from a variety of tests can be interpreted directly. However, the methodology for mapping a test to the CEFR requires human judgment: a group of experts independently make judgments about where particular test takers, language samples, or test questions fit on the CEFR scale. As a result, mapping exercises conducted by different experts on separate occasions may produce different results.

Interpreting the infographic

The infographic below represents a combination of concordance studies and CEFR mappings that have been officially produced by test providers. IELTS and Cambridge English qualifications were mapped to the CEFR by Cambridge Assessment, Pearson have provided a concordance study linking the Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE) to IELTS. ETS and the British Council have provided mappings of the TOEFL iBT and Aptis test to the CEFR respectively.

Note that the British Council does not provide explicit score equivalences for each CEFR level. They provide an average CEFR band depending on the CEFR bands achieved for individual modules (e.g. Speaking, Reading, Writing and Listening). IELTS and TOEFL iBT do not provide score mappings for bands A2 and below. The Pearson PTE Academic does not map to bands A1 or pre-A1.

These equivalences should be used for guidance only, and are subject to change as testing organisations update their mapping or score equivalences.

CEFR ¹		CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH QUALIFICATIONS ³	IELTS ⁴	PTE ACADEMIC ⁵	TOEFL iBT ⁶	APTIS ^{7,8}
Level	Score range ²	Score range	Band	Score range	Score range	CEFR level
C2		C2 Proficiency 200–230	8–9	85+	95+	C
C1		C1 Advanced 180–200	6.5–8	66–84		
B2	111–140	B2 First for Schools 160–180	5.5–6.5	36–65	72–94	B2
B1	81–110	B1 Preliminary for Schools 140–160	4–5.5	23–35	42–71	B1
A2	51–80	A2 Key for Schools/A2 Flyers 120–140		10–22		A2
Below A2	0–50	A1 Movers 100–120				A1
		Pre-A1 Starters 80–100				

¹Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001). Council of Europe: Cambridge University Press.

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

²Oxford Test of English Test Specifications. (2020). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/elt/general_content/global/ote/ote_global_oxford_test_of_english_test_specifications_2020.pdf

³The Cambridge English Scale Explained. (2019). UCLES 2019: CER/4240/V2/AUG19.

<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/210434-converting-practice-test-scores-to-cambridge-english-scale-scores.pdf>

⁴IELTS and the CEFR. (2021). British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English.

<https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/ielts-and-the-cefr.ashx?la=en>

⁵Test Comparisons. (2018). Pearson Education, Inc.

<https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/english/versant-test/VET-VWT-CEFR-comparison-to-other-English-tests.pdf>

⁶Papageorgiou, S., Tannenbaum, R. J., Bridgeman, B. and Cho, Y. (2015). The Association Between TOEFL iBT® Test Scores and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) Levels. ETS Research Memorandum, ETS RM-15-06.

<https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-15-06.pdf>

⁷O'Sullivan, B. (2015). Linking the Aptis Reporting Scales to the CEFR. British Council TR/2015/003.

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/reporting-scales>

⁸Results and Scoring. (2021). British Council.

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/why-choose-aptis/results-scoring>