

**The intended purposes and uses of the Cambridge English Placement Test**

The Cambridge English Placement Test is designed to help teachers and course managers make rapid decisions about which class to place students in or whether a learner can join a particular course, such as an exam preparation course leading to a Cambridge ESOL examination. The test can be used for all levels. The test contains reading and listening tasks. The test scores may be combined with results of other forms of assessment, such as speaking and writing skills, to get an overall picture of the proficiency of students that is most appropriate for the objectives of the class or course. The Cambridge English Placement Test should thus be seen as providing reliable information about a learner's level at a particular time.

The intended test purpose is to provide quick and accurate information for placement purposes in English language classes/courses, with the ancillary purpose of providing feedback to teachers and learners about a learner's current proficiency level.

The purpose of the Cambridge English Placement Test is achieved by placing the learner on the proficiency scale that has been constructed and used by Cambridge ESOL for its Main Suite examinations (i.e. the Cambridge Common Scale of Ability) and reporting their level in terms of the Council of Europe CEFR levels. As such, the Cambridge English Placement Test is an indication of an outcome of a learning period at a point in time.

**Research and validation around the Cambridge English Placement Test**

More than 15 years of development and research activity into online computer adaptive testing (CAT) and placement testing precede the launch of the Cambridge English Placement Test. The research has addressed issues of reliability (whole test, test-retest), validity (concurrent and predictive), equivalence, comparability (between paper & pencil and online versions of the test, and between the Cambridge English Placement Test and other Cambridge ESOL tests), speededness, impact, and security. These research studies were carried out in addition to standard operational analyses relating to score reporting, score interpretation, item and whole test difficulty, reliability, discrimination, SEM, and the relationship between learner variables such as age, L1, gender and attainment (e.g. Geranpayeh 2003, Jones 2003).

All of the items in the Cambridge English Placement Test have been through Cambridge ESOL's quality control procedures for test development and validation (Saville 2003). The items in the data bank are continuously updated, pretested and added to. Pretesting ensures that each new item is anchored to the Cambridge Common Scale of Ability. As a result of item banking, items are selected for their good measurement characteristics.

Currently, various situations of use are being investigated. Also, differential item functioning (DIF) and bias studies are planned to detect and if possible compensate for bias associated with L1 group, familiarity with computers, or other features of candidates, such as age or gender.

**Technical qualities of the Cambridge English Placement Test**

The reliability, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha, of the paper-based version of the Cambridge English Placement Test is well within the target range with an overall alpha of 0.82-0.88. Research shows that with a 40-item multilevel linear placement test a reliability range between 0.84-0.91 can be expected. These reliabilities are

based on data collected from a wide range of candidates of differing proficiency levels. Standard error of measurement (SEM) was estimated to be around  $\pm 2.44$  for a 40-item test.

The reliability of the computer-based version of the Cambridge English Placement Test cannot be estimated in the same way as the paper-based version because in a computer adaptive test each candidate sees a different set of items, i.e. each test is different. Average reliability of a computer adaptive test is reported by a Rasch analysis. The overall test reliability estimates for the online version of the Cambridge English Placement Test using the Rasch approach were in the region of 0.92, consistent with the figures reported for similar computer-based tests. The SEM was found to be 0.39 logit for the online version, which is approximately  $\pm 4$  marks on a 50-scale score.

Correlations between scores and bands on the paper-based and computer-based versions of the Cambridge English Placement Test were found to be in the region of 0.86.

## References

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