



Cambridge Assessment
English

The Cambridge English approach to Item Writing

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Poll

What stage of your teaching career are you at?

- A. doing pre-service or initial teacher-training
- B. already teaching but fairly new
- C. have been teaching for a long time
- D. not a teacher



Guiding Principles for test production

- Validity
- Reliability
- Impact
- Practicality
- Fairness



Validity

- What is the test purpose?
- Which abilities are tested?
- How are the test results used?



Reliability

- Clear test specifications
- Clear and accurate mark schemes
- Consistency of test environment



Impact

- Consequences for test takers, parents, employers
- Effect on teachers and schools
- Impact on teaching and learning



Practicality

- Ease of producing the test
- Ease of marking the test
- Ease of administering the test
- Available resources



Fairness

- Should not discriminate against any sub-group
- Should not advantage any sub-group
- Should be fair to stakeholders



Poll 2

Have you ever written a classroom test for your students?

A. Yes

B. No



Part 2

Questions 8 – 13

You will hear an interview with a writer called Peter Taylor.
For each question, put a tick (✓) in the correct box.

Rubric

Task
(multiple-choice)

- 8 In Peter's first book, the story takes place in
- A a country which he's recently been to.
- B a country where he lived as a child.
- C the country where he was born.

☐
☐
☐

Item

- 9 When Peter first went to England, he visited his
- A grandfather.
- B uncle and aunt.
- C cousins.

☐
☐
☐

Stem

Options

- 10 Peter spends most of his year
- A near the beach.
- B in a city.
- C at his farm.

☐
☐
☐



Role of Item Writer for Cambridge English

- is usually an external consultant
- usually produces tasks for a particular question paper
- uses Item Writer Guidelines to write material
- is supported by 'Chair' of the Item Writing paper team
- Chair provides training and advice



Test material production process

- Commissioning of writers
- First submission by writer
- Reviewed by Chair, another writer and Assessment Manager
- Accepted, rejected or returned to writer for revisions
- Second submission by writer
- Edited
- Pretested on learners
- Review of pretest results
- Used in live test



Multiple-choice questions

An exciting journey for Louisa

Louisa sealed the envelope and put a strip of sticky tape across the closure – just in case. She didn't want any of her documents to fall out in transit. It seemed weird in this day and age that the only way to apply for a visa was to put her passport in the post – but she guessed there must be good reasons. At the beginning, she had naively thought she'd be able to do it all online, and so had left it a bit late – all this posting back and forth had added a week or more to the time needed to complete the process. Never mind, she'd had everything double-checked at the post office, where the man had advised lots of other people, so nothing should go wrong.

When Louisa sent in her application form, she felt

- A confident because she'd had expert help.
- B worried that she'd left out something important.
- C silly because she wasn't able to do it on the internet.
- D relieved that she had managed to meet the deadline.



Productive task

Glow worms

You will hear a woman giving a talk about glow worms.

Complete the sentences with a word or short phrase.

F: Good evening. On my travels around the world I've been fortunate enough to see a lot of glow worms and I'm always delighted to talk about them partly because sadly they're not as numerous as they used to be. The first thing to say about the common glow worm is that it's nothing like a worm, but in fact, resembles a beetle.

The male can be easily distinguished from the female by the fact that it has wings and that it never glows – you don't see its tail shedding light.

2. The male glow worm looks different from the female because it has and does not glow.



Unsuitable topics

- Avoidance of topics that may distress or offend candidates
- For example: war; religion; smoking; gambling; recreational drugs
- Important to ensure that content is suitable for an international candidature



Items which can be improved

What did the writer find unusual about Melton?

- A** the location of the town hall
- B** the small number of shops
- C** the design of the square
- D** the lack of green spaces



Items that can be improved

You will hear a young man, Dan, asking his friend, Lucy, for advice about giving a presentation.

What is Lucy's main piece of advice?

- A Rehearse your talk in advance.**
- B Make sure the audience is listening.**
- C Look smarter than usual.**

Dan: I've got to give a presentation to my class tomorrow and I'm really nervous about it. I've seen you give loads of presentations, Lucy, and you never seem at all worried. What's your secret?

Lucy: You've nothing to worry about, Dan! You know your stuff and you'll be speaking to friendly people who want to hear what you have to say. You'll sail through it! But to help with your confidence, you might want to make a bit of extra effort with your appearance – you know, trousers not jeans, shoes not trainers – that sort of thing. Apart from that, just enjoy it! You can practise giving the presentation to me this evening, if that would help.

Dan: Thanks. But I think I might go to bed early and get a good night's sleep



Items that don't work

You will hear a pilot called Peter Marks, talking about his job.

Peter: There are some key skills required if you're thinking of becoming a pilot, so if being decisive or confident are qualities you lack, this is probably a job to avoid! Fortunately, I have no problems in those areas. It's also useful if you have spatial awareness and are good at solving problems.'

Peter advises people against a career as a pilot if they aren't

- A. confident decision-makers.
- B. spatially aware.
- C. good problem-solvers.



Items that can be improved

You hear a young actor talking about her career.

[speaker: female early 20s]

F: Because I come from a family so heavily involved in the theatre, people wrongly assume that my parents put pressure on me to follow an acting career. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, neither of them really supported my pursuit of an acting career initially, I think mostly because they could see just how difficult a professional life in the business could be. And I respect them for that because it wasn't that they doubted my ability, and they certainly realised why I needed to go on the stage – I guess they just wanted me to have a more stable career!

What is she doing when she talks about her parents?

A defending their attitude towards her

B complaining about their lack of support

C explaining why they didn't really understand her



Issues with texts

(Extract from Listening script on the subject of a safari holiday company in Africa)

We encourage guests at the safari camp to support our local school and to date, we have raised enough money to fund twelve students as well as three teachers. The government employs three local guides and wardens who protect the animals from poachers who shoot the animals for their skins or, in the case of elephants, kill them merely to remove their tusks. There continues to be international demand for ivory from elephant tusks. For our part, we work closely with the local village and our next project is to help build and pay for an animal clinic.



Problem item

You overhear two boys talking about a trip to the cinema. What time will Bob meet Sam?

- A. 7.55
- B. 8.15
- C. 20.00

Sam: Hi Bob! Are we still going to the cinema on Saturday?

Bob: I hope so! I've already bought the tickets for the 8.15 showing.

Sam: Great! Let's meet 20 minutes earlier so we can get some popcorn.

Bob: Awesome. See you then.



The advantage of taking business courses when in the fashion industry is

- A. to learn how to market one's designs better.
- B. to understand how to make clothing.
- C. to gain knowledge of the philosophy of fashion.



Problematic phrasing

According to the passage, most people don't understand instructions unless they're

- A. written down.
- B. familiar with the subject.
- C. in a cognitively receptive environment.



Important considerations in item writing

- one clear key
- clear and unambiguous phrasing
- assessment of language and not world knowledge
- avoidance of unsuitable topics
- avoidance of culturally specific references
- consistency in phrasing and length of options
- no mathematical calculations



Thank you

