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# **Understanding reading assessment:**

**what every teacher should know**

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Ivana Vidakovic and Dennis Carr

**Cambridge English**

# Who are you?






- A. I'm a teacher.
- B. I'm the co-ordinator/director of studies.
- C. I'm a learner.
- D. I'm a parent.




# Why are you here?

- A. I need evidence of Continuous Professional Development.
- B. I want to earn an Open Badge.
- C. I want to know more about reading assessment.
- D. Other



# Digital Open Badges


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## Digital Open Badges

### What are Open Badges?

A Digital Open Badge shows others what you have accomplished. It can show your skills or interests, or any Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that you have achieved. Open Badges are displayed on social networking profiles, online CVs, job sites and more. Badges contain information about your learning achievements and CPD activities.



Your badges can help employers, organisations, educational institutions and individuals to verify your skills, interests and achievements.

### How can I earn an Open Badge?

You can get a badge by attending and participating in events that offer Open Badges. At Cambridge English these include webinars, events and training days. When you have attended the event and fulfilled that badge's learning objectives, you can claim your badge.

Open Badges from Cambridge English are in Beta. There will be lots of chances to give your feedback about how useful Open Badges are for you.

### How do I collect and share Open Badges?

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/events/open-badges>

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## **what every teacher should know**

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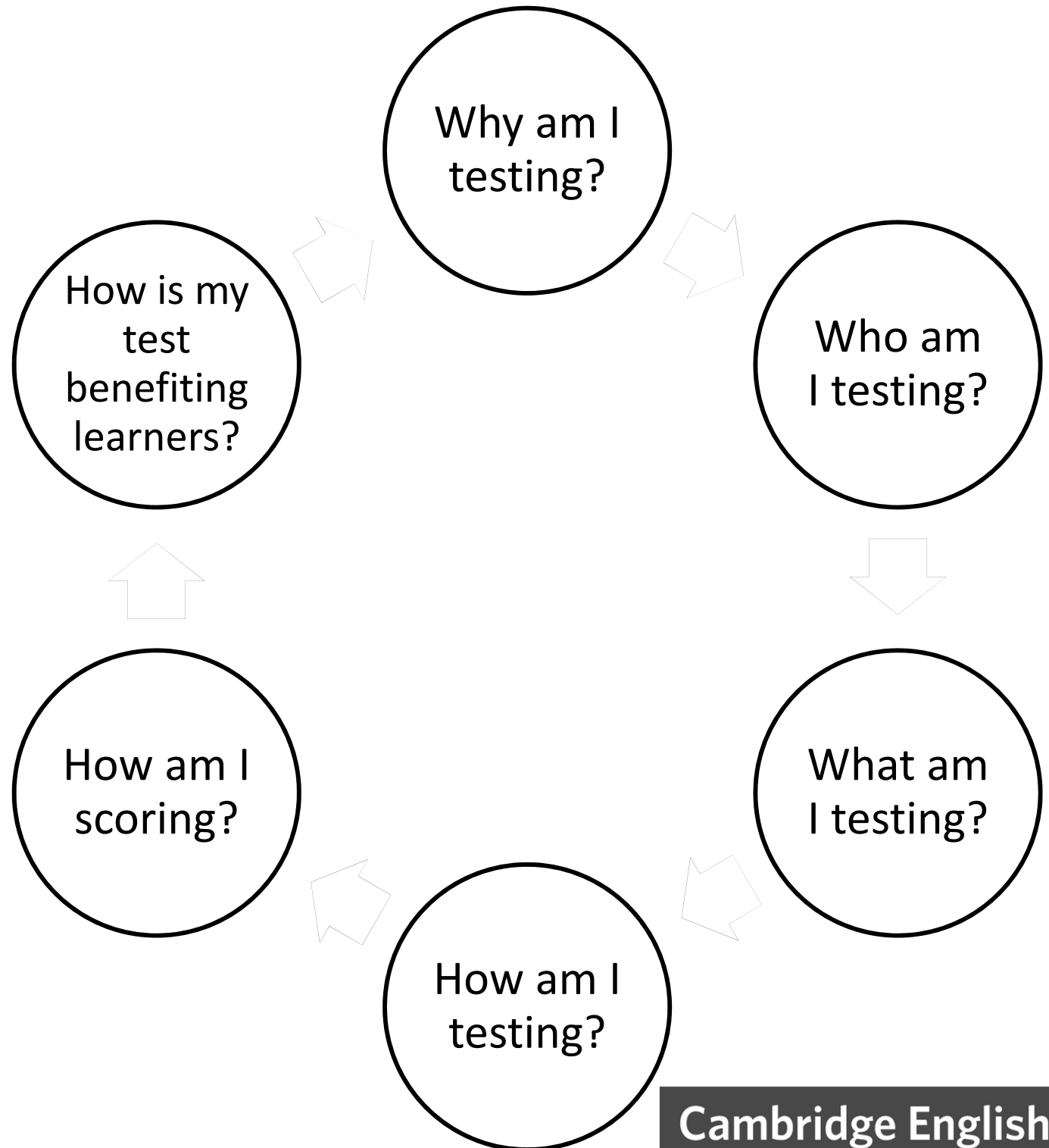
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## Our aim today

### Explore:

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- **key questions**
- **practical tips**



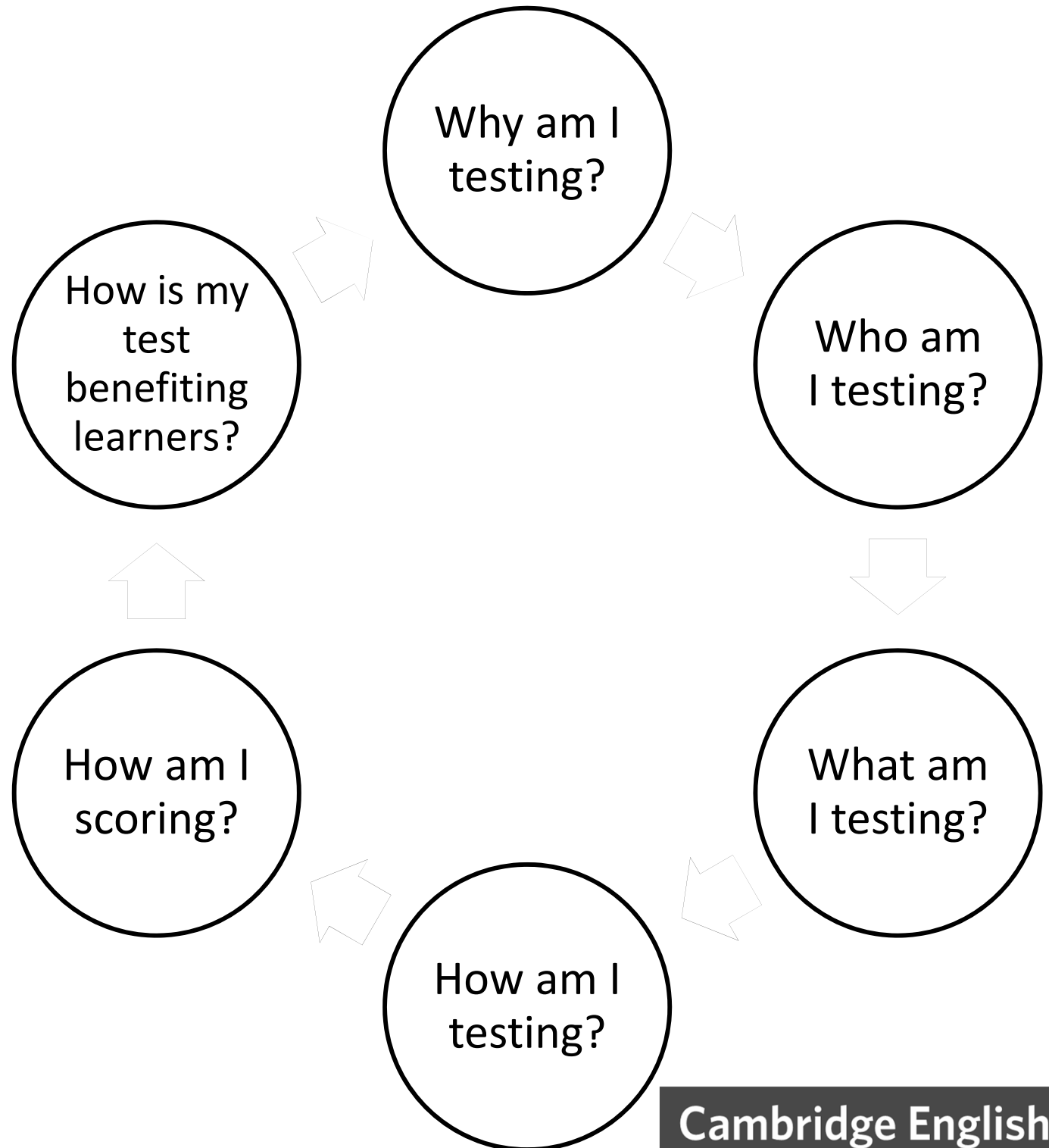
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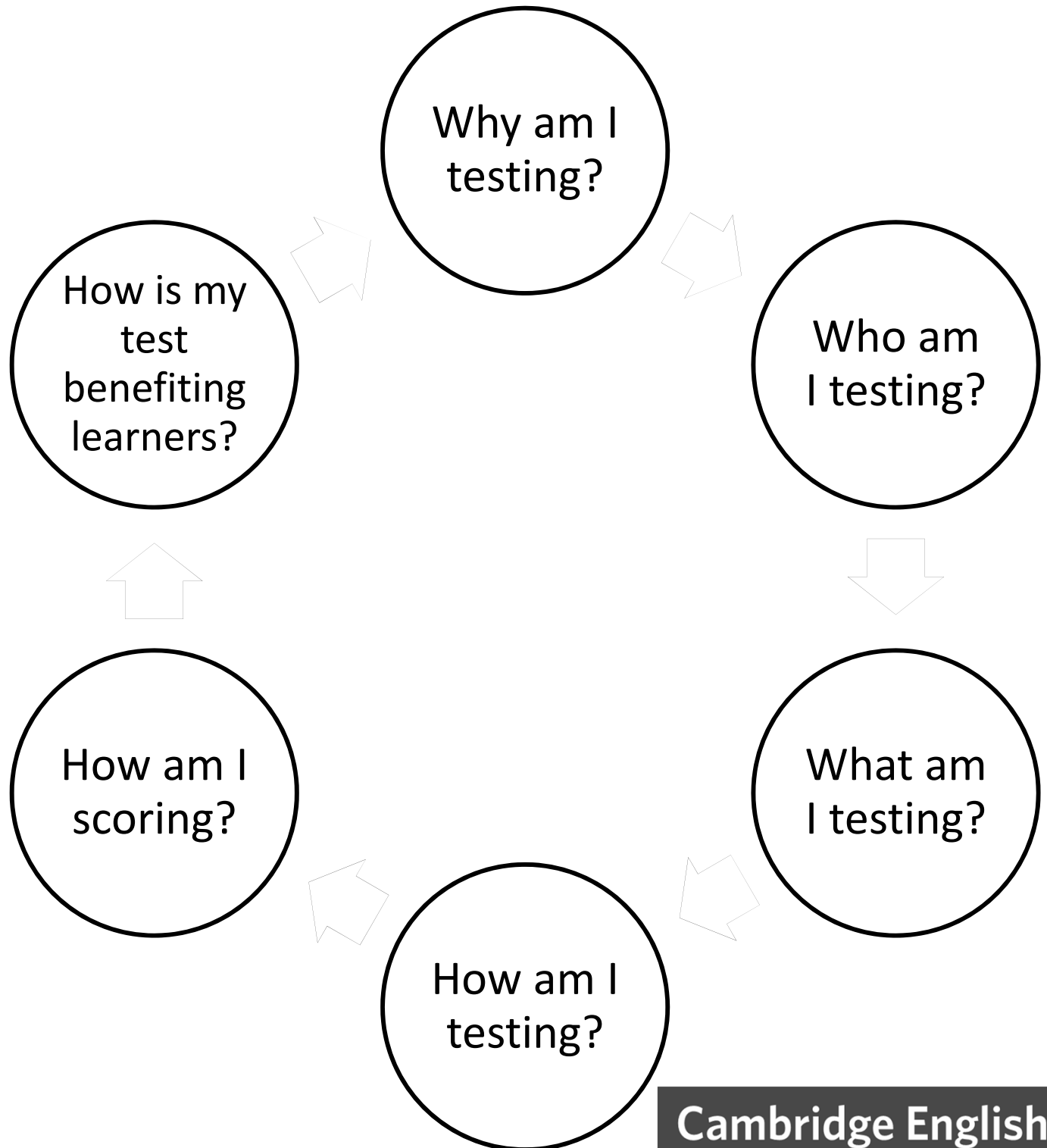
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### Explore:

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- **key questions**
- **practical tips**



When creating a reading task,  
what should you be aware of?



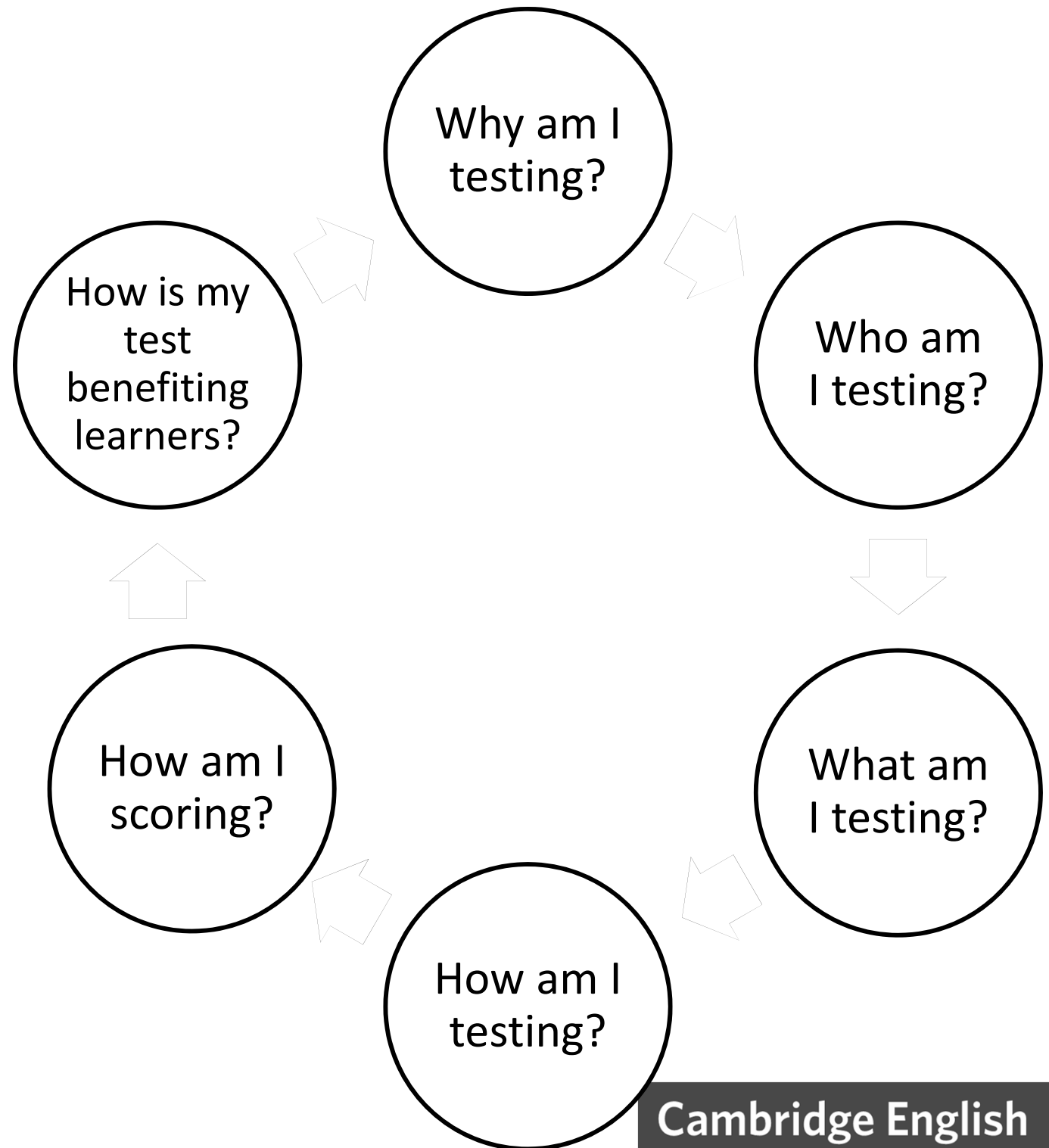
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# What am I testing?

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## Types of reading



# How do we read in real life?

Which reading skills do you use when you read:

A. a timetable?

# How do we read in real life?

Which reading skills do you use when you read:

A. a timetable?

B. a newspaper?

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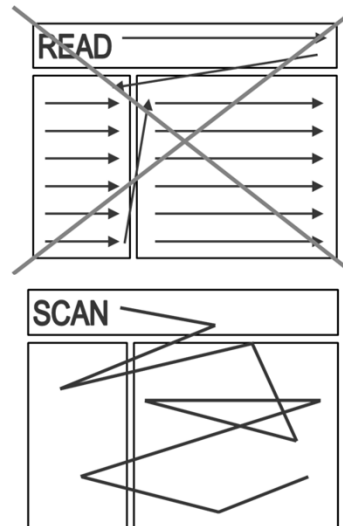
C. a poem?

# Types of reading

**Careful  
reading**



**Fast  
reading**



# Activity 1: which type of reading?

Read the questions first. Then read the next four passages about four cities quickly and selectively to find the answers.

1. In which city was a new theatre built recently?
2. Which city has the largest percentage of postgraduate students?



## Activity 2: which type of reading?

You are going to read part of the autobiography of a surfing instructor. For questions 1–9, choose from the sections A–E. You have 5 minutes to complete these questions.

In which section does the writer mention:

1. feeling satisfaction that her determination resulted in better performance?
2. a change that helped her pursue her hobby?

# Activity 3: which type of reading?

You have 1 minute to quickly read through the 1,000-word article and respond to the following question:

What is this text about?

A.

B.

C.

# Activity 4: which type of reading?

Read this extract from a novel. For questions 31–36 choose the correct answer.

## Question 33

What does the writer suggest about Sandy's clothes?

- A. They made it unlikely that she would be spotted.
- B. She was wearing them because she belonged to a skiing team.
- C. They were too heavy for the conditions.
- D. She had chosen them with care.

# Practise with your students

- Careful reading: at all levels
- Fast reading: not before B1 level on the CEFR
  - Introduce scanning at B1
  - Introduce other fast reading skills from B2
  - Practise switching between careful and fast reading in a single task

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# **What am I testing?**

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**Cognitive  
processes during  
reading  
comprehension**

# What do we do when we read?

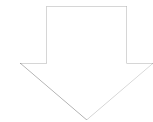
Recognise and understand a **word**



Understand the **basic** meaning of a **phrase** or **sentence**



Understand **implied** meaning ('read between the lines')



Understand and combine information across **texts**



Understand information across a **whole text**



Understand information **across sentences** or a **paragraph**

# Skilled readers ...

- set goals and decide on skills to use
- use knowledge and make predictions
- monitor their own comprehension
- reread, where necessary.

# Task 1: which cognitive processes?

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

*From Carroll (1872) Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*

Question 1: What did the toves do?

- a) They wabed.
- b) They gyred and gimble.
- c) They brilliged.



## Task 2: which cognitive processes?

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Question 2: Which word describes the raths?

# Task 3: which cognitive processes?

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!'  
He took his vorpal sword in hand:  
Long time the manxome foe he sought.  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.

Question 3.

What did the son in this poem intend to do?

- A. He intended to play with the Jabberwock.
- B. He intended to take a nap under the Tumtum tree.
- C. He intended to attack the Jabberwock.

# Task 4: which cognitive processes?

You are going to read four reviews of a book. For questions 1–4 choose from reviews A–D.

Which reviewer:

1. has a different opinion from the others on Smith's work?
2. expresses a similar view to reviewer B on modern architecture?

# The most challenging task(s)?

Which of the last four tasks is the most challenging?

- Task 1
- Task 2
- Task 3
- Task 4

# Practising reading skills

- Increase vocabulary and knowledge of grammar and sentence structure
- Practise paraphrasing and understanding paraphrase
- Practise reading ‘between the lines’
- Differentiate between main idea and supporting detail
- Recognise text structure
- Compare/contrast information in a text and across texts

# Practising metacognitive skills

- Predict

# Practising metacognitive skills

- Predict
- Set goals

# Practising metacognitive skills

- Predict
- Set goals



**How did the writer's attitude change during the passage?**



# Practising metacognitive skills

- Predict
- Set goals
- Monitor your own understanding
- Reread, if necessary

# Practising metacognitive skills

- Predict
- Set goals
- Monitor your own understanding
- Reread, if necessary

but ...

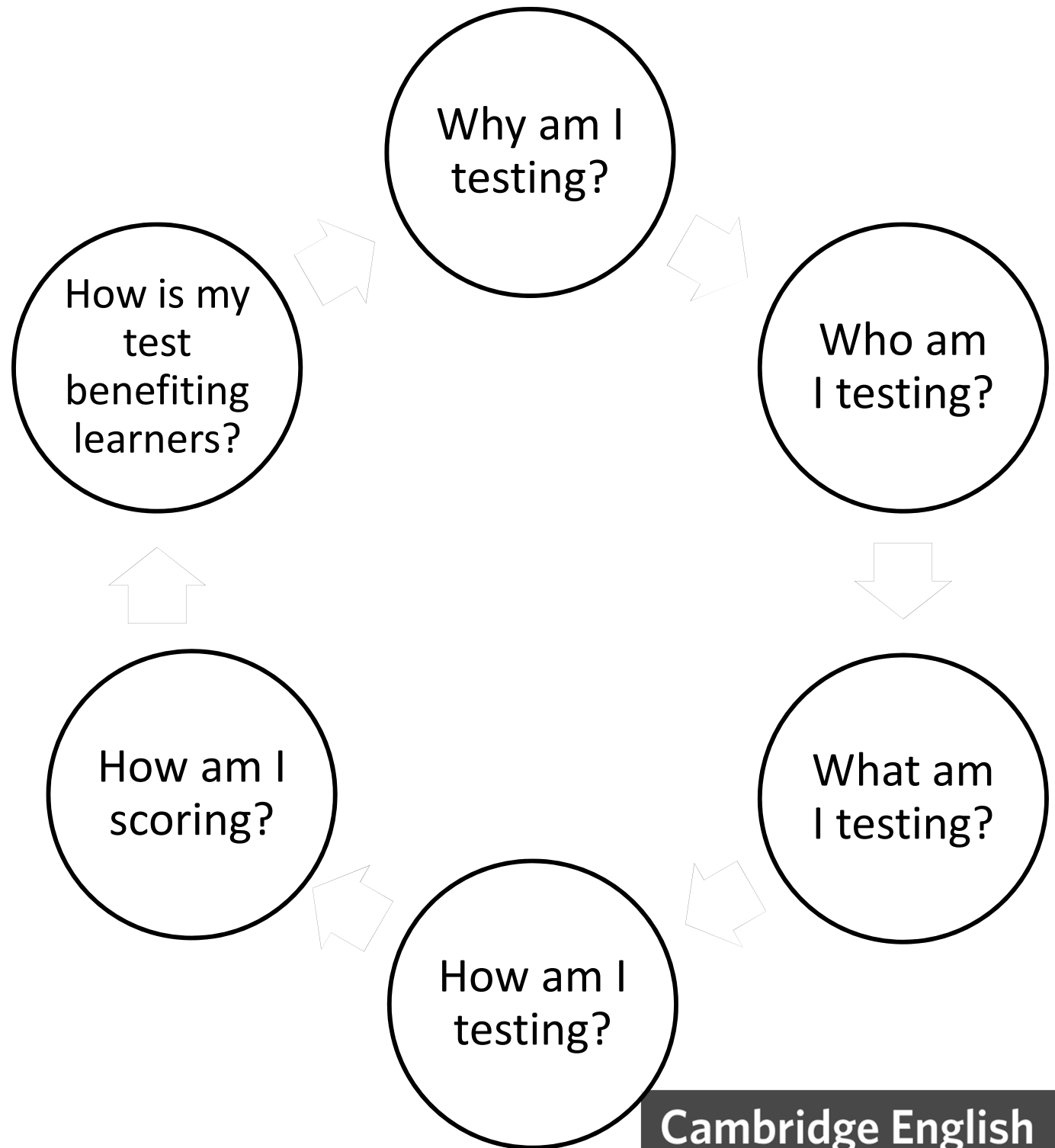
- don't dwell on unfamiliar words.

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# How am I testing?

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What are the reading test tasks?



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# **Reading comprehension: text types**

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# What do you read in everyday life?

1. What do you usually read? (in English or another language)?

# Possible text types

- Extracts from books (fiction and non-fiction)
  - Newspaper and magazine articles
  - Advertisements
  - Public signs and notices
  - Informational material: brochures, guides, manuals
  - Correspondence: text messages, letters or emails
- Etc.

# What do you read in everyday life?

1. What do you usually read? (in English or another language)?
2. What are the differences between the types of material you read?

# Differences in reading material

- Length
- Style (formal/informal)
- Language
- Purpose for which something is written
- Subject matter (specialised/general)
- Nature of information (concrete/abstract)
- Text structure

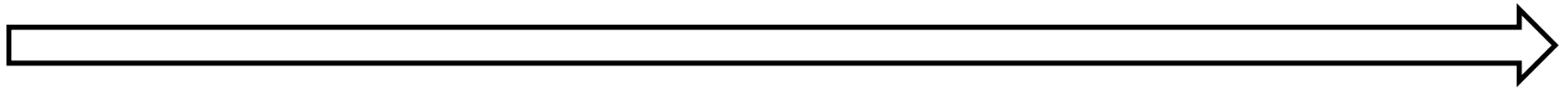


# Task difficulty: topic/type of information

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**LESS DIFFICULT**

**MORE DIFFICULT**



**Personal**

**Non-personal**

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**Familiar**

**Unfamiliar**

**Concrete**

**Abstract**

**No specialist  
knowledge required**

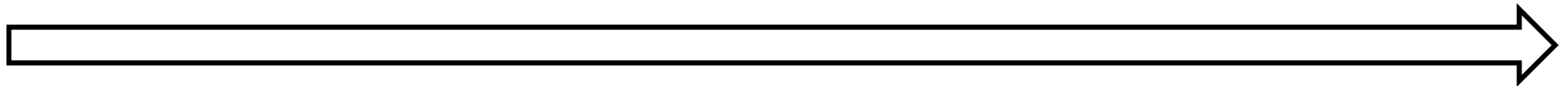
**Specialist knowledge  
required**

# Task difficulty: language

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**LESS DIFFICULT**

**MORE DIFFICULT**



**Simple sentences only**

**Complex sentences**

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**Short sentences only**

**Long sentences**

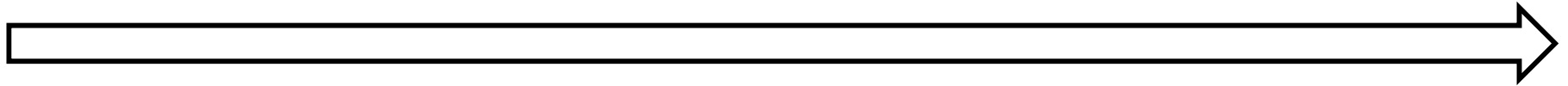
**Common, highly  
frequent words only**

**Complex and  
sophisticated words**

# Task difficulty: discourse mode

**LESS DIFFICULT**

**MORE DIFFICULT**



**Simple text structure  
and language**

**Complex text structure  
and language**

**Description**

**Description**

**Narration**

**Narration**

**Instruction**

**Instruction**

**Exposition**

**Argumentation**

# Task difficulty: example

## Concrete information

An invitation to an ice-skating party



## Abstract information

Reviews of a book about how architecture can affect the emotions

### The Architecture of Happiness

*Four reviewers comment on philosopher Alain De Botton's book*

**A**

Alain de Botton is a brave and highly intelligent writer who writes about complex subjects, clarifying the arcane for the layman. Now, with typical self-assurance, he has turned to the subject of architecture. The essential theme of his book is how architecture influences mood and behaviour. It is not about the specifically architectural characteristics of space and design, but much more about the emotions that architecture inspires in the users of buildings. Yet architects do not normally talk nowadays very much about emotion and beauty. They talk about design and function. De Botton's message, then, is fairly simple but worthwhile precisely because it is simple, readable and timely. His commendable aim is to encourage architects, and society more generally, to pay more attention to the psychological consequences of design in architecture: architecture should be treated as something that affects all our lives, our happiness and well-being.

**B**

Alain de Botton raises important, previously unasked, questions concerning the quest for beauty in architecture, or its rejection or denial. Yet one is left with the feeling that he needed the help and support of earlier authors on the subject to walk him across the daunting threshold of architecture itself. And he is given to making extraordinary claims: 'Architecture is perplexing ... in how inconsistent is its capacity to generate the happiness on which its claim to our attention is founded.' If architecture's capacity to generate happiness is inconsistent, this might be because happiness has rarely been something architects think about. De Botton never once discusses the importance of such dull, yet determining, matters as finance or planning laws, much less inventions such as the lift or reinforced concrete. He appears to believe that architects are still masters of their art, when increasingly they are cogs in a global machine for building in which beauty, and how de Botton feels about it, are increasingly beside the point.

**C**

In *The Architecture of Happiness*, Alain de Botton has a great time making bold and amusing judgements about architecture, with lavish and imaginative references, but anyone in search of privileged insights into the substance of building design should be warned that he is not looking at drain schedules or pipe runs. He worries away, as many architects do, at how inert material things can convey meaning and alter consciousness. Although he is a rigorous thinker, most of de Botton's

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**Reading  
comprehension:  
task types**

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# Selected-response task types

- Multiple choice
- Multiple matching
- True/False or Right/Wrong/Doesn't say
- Gapped text tasks with missing words/sentences/ paragraphs and fixed answer options

# (Semi-)productive task types

- Semi-productive tasks:
  - Gapped text tasks with missing words or phrases
  - Information transfer

# (Semi-)productive task types

- Semi-productive tasks:
  - Gapped text tasks with missing words or phrases
  - Information transfer
- Productive tasks:
  - Short answer questions
  - Integrated reading and writing or reading and speaking




# Which task type is this?

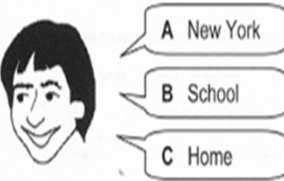
**Part 3**

**Questions 11 – 15**

Complete the five conversations.  
For questions 11 – 15, mark **A, B** or **C** on your answer sheet.

**Example:**

0  Where do you come from?

 A New York  
B School  
C Home

**Answer:** 0 

A	B	C
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

---

11 I'm sorry we don't have your size.      A What a pity!  
B I hope so.  
C I'll take it.

12 How long are you going to stay in Bangkok?      A For another three weeks.  
B For the last three weeks.  
C It took three weeks.

**Part 5**

You are going to read an extract from a novel in which a young woman called Caitlin talks about her life on an island. For questions 31 – 36, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

We live on the island of Hale. It's about four kilometres long and two kilometres wide at its broadest point, and it's joined to the mainland by a causeway called the Stand - a narrow road built across the mouth of the river which separates us from the rest of the country. Most of the time you wouldn't know we're on an island because the river mouth between us and the mainland is just a vast stretch of tall grasses and brown mud. But when there's a high tide and the water rises a half a metre or so above the road and nothing can pass until the tide goes out again a few hours later, then you know it's an island.

We were on our way back from the mainland. My older brother, Dominic, had just finished his first year at university in a town 150 km away. Dominic's train was due in at five and he'd asked for a lift back from the station. Now, Dad normally hates being disturbed when he's writing (which is just about all the time), and he also hates having to go anywhere, but despite the typical sighs and moans – why can't he get a taxi? what's wrong with the bus? – I could tell by the sparkle in his eyes that he was really looking forward to seeing Dominic.

So, anyway, Dad and I had driven to the mainland and picked up Dominic from the station. He had been talking non-stop from the moment he'd slung his rucksack in the boot and got in the car. University this, university that, writers, books, parties, people, money, gigs... And when I say talking, I don't mean talking as in having a conversation, I mean talking as in jabbering like a mad thing. I didn't like it ... the way he spoke and waved his hands around as if he was some kind of intellectual or something. It was embarrassing. It made me feel uncomfortable – that kind of discomfort you feel when someone you like, someone close to you, suddenly starts acting like a complete idiot. And I didn't like the way he was ignoring me, either. For all the attention I was getting I might as well not have been there. I felt a stranger in my own car.

- 31 In the first paragraph, what is Caitlin's main point about the island?
- A It can be dangerous to try to cross from the mainland.
  - B It is much smaller than it looks from the mainland.
  - C It is only completely cut off at certain times.
  - D It can be a difficult place for people to live in.
- 32 What does Caitlin suggest about her father?
- A His writing prevents him from doing things he wants to with his family.
  - B His initial reaction to his son's request is different from usual.
  - C His true feelings are easily hidden from his daughter.
  - D His son's arrival is one event he will take time off for.
- 33 Caitlin emphasises her feelings of discomfort because she
- A is embarrassed that she doesn't understand what her brother is talking about.
  - B feels confused about why she can't relate to her brother any more.
  - C is upset by the unexpected change in her brother's behaviour.
  - D feels foolish that her brother's attention is so important to her.
- 34 In the fourth paragraph, what is Caitlin's purpose in describing the island?
- A to express her positive feelings about it
  - B to explain how the road was built
  - C to illustrate what kind of weather was usual
  - D to describe her journey home

# Multiple choice

## Part 3

### Questions 11 – 15

Complete the five conversations.  
For questions 11 – 15, mark **A**, **B** or **C** on your answer sheet.

#### Example:

0



Where do you come from?



A New York

B School

C Home

Answer:

0

A B C

11 I'm sorry we don't have your size.

A What a pity!

B I hope so.

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12 How long are you going to stay in Bangkok?

A For another three weeks.

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- A to express her positive feelings about it
- B to explain how the road was built
- C to illustrate what kind of weather was usual
- D to describe her journey home

# Which task type is this?

Completes the email.  
Write ONE word for each space.

For questions 41 – 50, write the words on your answer sheet.

Example: 0 has

From: Jessie  
To: Carmen

Thanks for your email.

This month (0) ..... been quite boring for me. I haven't had the time to do any (41) ..... the things I like. Our new teacher gives us too (42) ..... homework and the weather's been terrible (43) ..... the weekends. I haven't played tennis (44) ..... three weeks now! But (45) ..... is some good news! I can come and stay (46) ..... you in the summer. Mum and Dad have said yes! I (47) ..... so pleased.

The best time for me is (48) ..... second half of July. (49) ..... this okay? Please ask (50) ..... mum and dad and email me back. Then I can get my plane ticket.

## Part 6

You are going to read an extract from a magazine article. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs A – H the one which fits each gap (37 – 43). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

### Cowboys of Madagascar

*The anthropologist Luke Freeman joins a group of young Malagasy men on the cattle trail.*

As a socio-cultural anthropologist, I've lived in Madagascar for more than three years and I know the people, the language and the culture well. The cattle drives undertaken by young Malagasy men have fascinated me ever since I lived in a remote rice-farming village in the central highlands.

37

This gives an indication of how much the Malagasy love cattle. They are potent symbols on the island and it is common practice for young men to trade in them prior to marriage.

To fulfil my ambition, I headed for the frontier town of Tsironomandidy looking for a group of drovers with whom to share life on the road. Here I met Vonjy, a young man who had spent most of his life driving cattle across the island.

38

Our destination sat in the middle of nowhere, abandoned in a landscape of wide plains, where nothing grows but tall, swaying savannah grass. Undulating hills dip and rise to the horizon, the monotony broken only by the broad red scars of soil erosion. There is often no sign of life for miles. This was the land we were to cross with our herd of 52 zebu steers, the long-horned cattle found all over East Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

39

Far off in the darkness glowed the orange rings of bushfires lit to burn off the old dry grass and bring forth new green shoots. Ground that seemed flat in the daylight became treacherously uneven on a moonless night. Some of us formed a line either side of our cattle as we struggled to keep the herd together, shouting warnings to the drovers behind us. On one occasion we stopped to discover that two of our steers had disappeared.

40

The next morning we awoke, dew-damp, on a cloudy hilltop, not far from our destination. The cattle mooched slowly in the tall, wet grass. It was just dawn, but a woman and her daughter who had walked

16 kilometres to set up shop were already selling coffee and cakes wrapped in leaves.

Tsironomandidy hosts the largest cattle market in Madagascar. Every Wednesday, a huge cloud of dust hangs over the town, raised by the hundreds of cattle pressed into the wooden corrals.

41

This was an easier journey, a slow wandering over the highest peaks of central Madagascar. The head drover was a laid-back languorous man who didn't raise an eyebrow when he heard I was joining his team; we nicknamed him the President. Our somewhat haphazard meanderings through the hinterland came to a sudden end when, passing through a village near Firavahana, the President found a buyer for his cattle. It would take a couple of days to sort out the paperwork, so Vonjy and I decided to leave him to it.

42

From there, we got a lift 400 kilometres by road down to Madagascar's second biggest cattle market at Ambalavao, where Vonjy had more family in the trade. We joined them on another cattle drive up through the central highlands along Madagascar's main north-south road.

The highlands are the most crowded part of the island; every last hectare of land has been carved into neat rice terraces that scale the hillsides. From here, our journey took us eastwards into the forest.

43

I learnt that such minor hardships were easily overcome as my body became conditioned to the rhythm of the road: walking at cattle pace, prodding and coaxing the beasts; listening to the drovers' soft talk.

If there's a lesson to be learnt from the young men with whom I travelled, it's just how simple travelling can be. Over the hundreds of kilometres I travelled with the drovers, I never heard a cross word or an argument. You don't need a whole lot to be happy on such a journey.

# Gapped text

Complete the email.

Write ONE word for each space.

For questions 41 – 50, write the words on your answer sheet.

Example: 0

From:   
To:

Thanks for your email.

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Far off in the darkness glowed the orange rings of bushfires lit to burn off the old dry grass and bring forth new green shoots. Ground that seemed flat in the daylight became treacherously uneven on a moonless night. Some of us formed a line either side of our cattle as we struggled to keep the herd together, shouting warnings to the drovers behind us. On one occasion we stopped to discover that two of our steers had disappeared.

40

The next morning we awoke, dew-damp, on a cloudy hilltop, not far from our destination. The cattle mooched slowly in the tall, wet grass. It was just dawn, but a woman and her daughter who had walked

16 kilometres to set up shop were already selling coffee and cakes wrapped in leaves.

Tsiroanomandidy hosts the largest cattle market in Madagascar. Every Wednesday, a huge cloud of dust hangs over the town, raised by the hundreds of cattle pressed into the wooden corrals.

41

This was an easier journey, a slow wandering over the highest peaks of central Madagascar. The head drover was a laid-back languorous man who didn't raise an eyebrow when he heard I was joining his team; we nicknamed him the President. Our somewhat haphazard meanderings through the hinterland came to a sudden end when, passing through a village near Firavahana, the President found a buyer for his cattle. It would take a couple of days to sort out the paperwork, so Vonjy and I decided to leave him to it.

42

From there, we got a lift 400 kilometres by road down to Madagascar's second biggest cattle market at Ambalavao, where Vonjy had more family in the trade. We joined them on another cattle drive up through the central highlands along Madagascar's main north-south road.

The highlands are the most crowded part of the island; every last hectare of land has been carved into neat rice terraces that scale the hillsides. From here, our journey took us eastwards into the forest.

43

I learnt that such minor hardships were easily overcome as my body became conditioned to the rhythm of the road: walking at cattle pace, prodding and coaxing the beasts; listening to the drovers' soft talk.

If there's a lesson to be learnt from the young men with whom I travelled, it's just how simple travelling can be. Over the hundreds of kilometres I travelled with the drovers, I never heard a cross word or an argument. You don't need a whole lot to be happy on such a journey.

# Multiple choice: pros and cons



## Advantages

- Relatively easy to construct
- Quick to administer and mark
- Objective
- Wide coverage of reading skills
- Multiple observations of each aspect of ability



## Disadvantages

- Receptive skills only
- Not a real-life task
- Open to guessing
- Negative impact on teaching and learning

# Information transfer: pros and cons



## Advantages

- Relatively realistic
- Tests understanding of process, classification or narrative sequence



## Disadvantages

- Clear guidance for task completion is required
- Learner should be aware of predetermined assessment criteria

# Integrated skills tasks: pros and cons



## Advantages

- Realistic
- Motivating
- Variety of reading skills and processes
- More like learning than testing



## Disadvantages

- Somewhat inefficient
- Difficult to score
- Subjective judgement
- Cross-task/ability contamination

# No 'best' way to test reading comprehension

- No right or wrong task type as:
  - each has advantages and limitations
  - each is suitable for different purposes.
- A variety of task types in a test
  - avoids advantaging or disadvantaging your learners
  - allows coverage of a broad range of reading skills.



# Factors which affect task fairness

- Are the **tasks** at the right level of difficulty?

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# Factors which affect task fairness

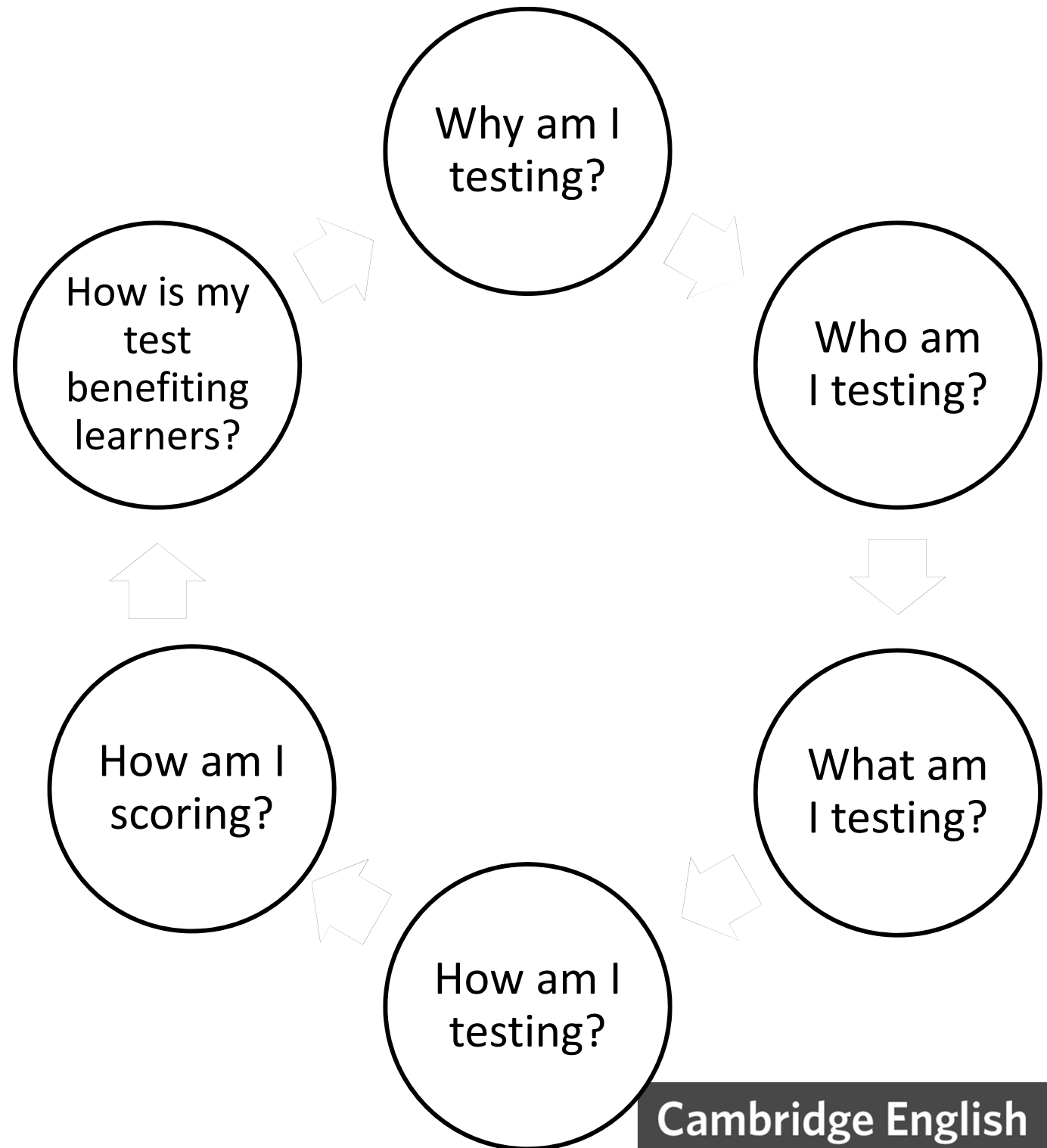
- Are the **tasks** at the right level of difficulty?
- Are the **instructions** clear?
- Is there a **range** of tasks?
- Are the items/tasks in a justifiable **order**?
- Is the **timing** for each part of the test appropriate?
- Are the **marking criteria** clear to the test takers?

---

## How am I scoring?

---

- What are the criteria?
- How do we weight tasks?
- How can we make sure that tests are reliably marked?



# Scoring

How should you score a multiple-choice question?

- a correct answer?
- an incorrect answer?



# Weighting



**Incorrect answer**

- 0 marks



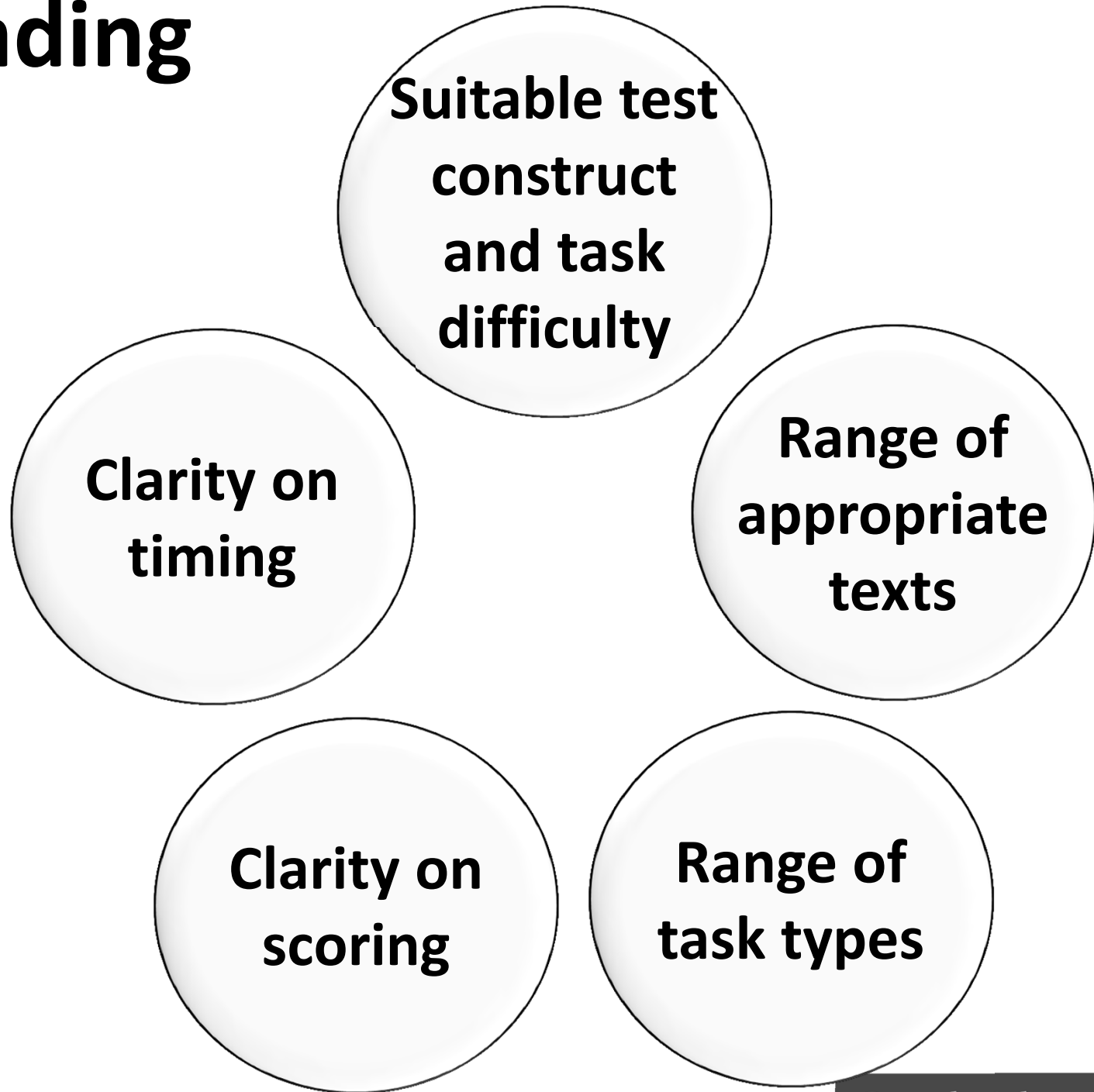
**Correct answer**

- 1 mark
- 2 marks

# Scoring guidance

- Spelling
  - alternative spelling (colour/color)
  - misspelling
- Punctuation
  - capitalisation
- Grammar

# Fair reading tests



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# Further information

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Cambridge English

# Free online activities for teenagers and adults

A1-A2 | 0-5 minutes




Basic  
**An email to a friend** >

This writing, grammar and vocabulary exercise practises the informal language used in emails. Choose the correct informal way to finish the sentences in the email.

A1-A2 | 0-5 minutes




Proficient  
**Statements and opinions** >



Independent  
**Websites for teens** >

Read the text about websites for teenagers and match the person with the website they would find most useful. This activity practises reading a text for detailed information.

B1-B2 | 5-10 minutes



Basic  
**Meeting people for the first time** >

When you meet someone for the first time, you ask questions. Find the correct reply to the



Independent  
**Past simple and present perfect** >

Read the text about a holiday in Spain. Choose the correct verb to complete the dialogue and practise the difference between past simple and the present perfect.

B1-B2 | 0-5 minutes



Independent  
**Which adverb?** >

Practise using the correct adverb in different

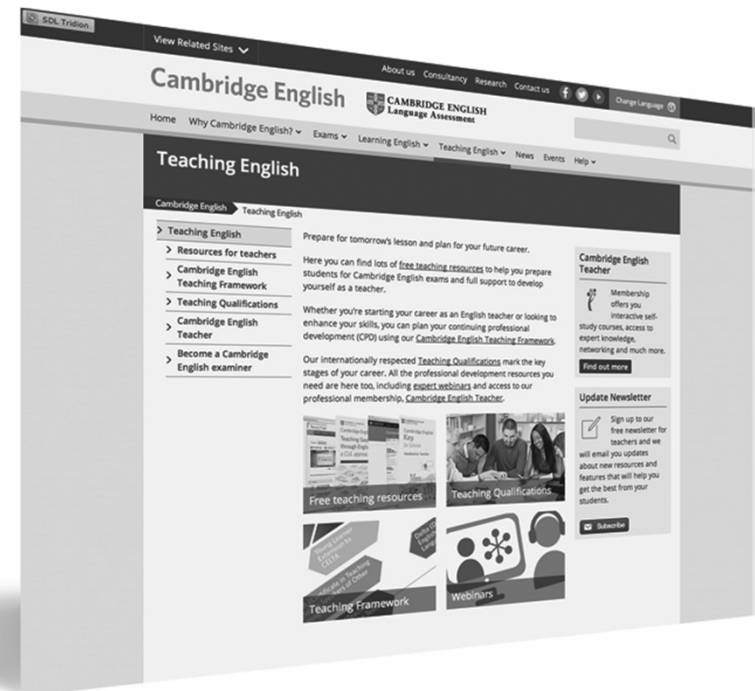
# Further information

## Understanding listening assessment 20 and 22 February 2017

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Fax: +44 (0)1223 553621  
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Keep up to date with what's new via the  
Cambridge English Language Assessment  
website:  
[www.cambridgeenglish.org](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org)

For information on Cambridge English  
webinars for teachers:  
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