

CAMBRIDGE EXAM TIPS

It's that time of year again, Cambridge Exam time!!! If you are one of the many people presenting for PET, FCE, CAE or Proficiency you're probably in the middle of a revision frenzy and starting to get a bit nervous! I know my students certainly are! So, I thought that this month it would be a good idea to give you all a few useful tips for the different papers and also some useful websites which you can use to do some extra practice for the big day!

First of all, let's have a look at the different papers. Obviously, each level has a slightly different exam and so different strategies, but some things we can apply to all of them.



This is normally the paper most people find the easiest, however, there are still lots of things we can do to get the best possible mark

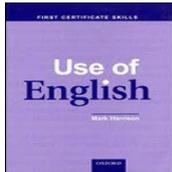
- **Multiple choice questions** - a good technique here is to first read the questions but not the answers. Then, read the text and form your own idea. Finally, look at the answers and decide which is closest to your opinion.
- **Multiple choice** - sometimes it looks like there is no possible answer from your options! If that happens, decide which answer it definitely ISN'T.
- **Gapped text** - normally the most difficult question for students. Here it's very important that you focus on reference words, substitution lexical links and pay attention to linking words. Also, make sure you have enough time to read it AGAIN to make sure it makes sense.



This paper is normally the last one you do after all the others which makes it even harder! You're tired and starting to lose concentration. Try to find some extra strength and remind yourself that after those 40 minutes it's all over! I'd suggest taking a banana or some high energy food as well for an extra boost!

- **Keep calm!** - in general, the more you panic, the worse your listening comprehension is. If you notice as you're listening that you're starting to get scared, take some deep breaths and focus. The worst thing you can do is allow panic to take over.
- **Smile!** - smiling is a natural way to relax the body. If you frown, you use more than 100 muscles in your face! So, smiling can help calm you down and understand better.

- **Take notes** - you are allowed to take notes during the listening exam on scrap paper (you just have to hand them in at the end). This can be a very useful tool especially for the multiple matching question.
- **LOGICAL ANSWERS!** - Especially common in the sentence completion question, people have a tendency to write rather silly answers. This is because we panic and don't think properly. Be logical and if you really have no idea then make a LOGICAL guess!



This paper involves lots of different areas of English but there are a number of techniques which help approach it

- **Open Cloze** - remember to think of the register of the text as this can help you choose words. Also, analyse what comes before AND after the space. Make sure you're careful about things like object pronouns, dependant prepositions and gerund or infinitive forms! After you've completed the paper, read it out loud (but very quietly!) as this can help you hear any mistakes.
- **Multiple choice cloze** - there are normally 2 answers which you can rule out quite quickly. Then focus on the other two. Again, saying the words out loud can help with recognising collocations. I think it can also help to cover the other questions with a piece of paper. That way you're not looking at so many words at once.
- **Keyword transformations** - always write something for these as they are marked in 2 parts. So if you get half of the sentence correct you will get 1 mark. Look at the first sentence and cross out the information which is in the transformation. Then look at the words which are left. These are what you need to transform with your keyword. This can help you identify what structure is being tested.
- **Gapped sentences** - every CAE student's nightmare! Try to find the sentence which has the most literal meaning and think of an answer for that first, then test it out in the others. It is useful to identify the word type you need, but remember; only the spelling needs to be the same. Produce can be both noun and verb for example.



Again, a lot of people think that you can't revise for this exam but you can!

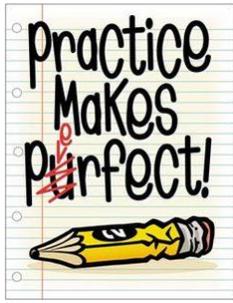
- **Part 1** - make sure you can give personal information about yourself. Do you know how to say your job or degree in English? To describe where you live? You're hobbies? Remember, here you want short but expanded answers, don't say yes/no! Use a good variety of language to make the answers more impressive. Think of strong adjectives, modifiers and so on.

- **Part 2** - again, this part can be prepared well in advance. You only have about a minute to do it, so learn a basic structure which will allow you to use lots of functional language for comparing. From FCE upwards you should NOT waste time describing what you can see, you have to hypothesise about the picture. That means modals, conditionals etc. Also try to incorporate discourse markers in this section (so, well, I'd say, I suppose....)
- **Part 3** - In the group discussion, you need to show how well you can communicate with other people. That means you need to ensure that you are involving your partner in the discussion so use a variety of functional language here. Also, don't start by giving your final answer or you won't have enough things to talk about. Discuss the pros and cons and THEN decide.
- **Part 4** - This is your moment to shine! Even if the rest of the exam has been a total disaster, you can really make a difference in this part. Dazzle your examiner with amazing functional language, interesting expressions and lots of discourse markers! A good tip is to make sure you refer to what your partner has said. Use language like you said earlier, I see your point but..., I agree with you up to a point..., I see what you mean etc.



Along with the listening, this is the question which most people fail. You should have been consistently practicing your writing throughout the year. If you haven't.....well, good luck!

- **Revising** - A lot of students think you can't prepare for this exam. This is NOT true; you can do a lot of preparation and revision. For each exam level there is writing styles you will have to do (FCE informal/formal letter, CAE informal/formal letter, article, proposal, report). You have to make sure that you are familiar with all of these styles.
- **Register** - collect the formal and informal ways to say things. For example, "all the best" vs "yours faithfully".
- **Make mini plan's** - for each question type, you should to prepare a mini plan with the correct layout and useful language you can incorporate. Practise doing this mini plans regularly and when you sit down in the exam you can write them out. Sorted!
- **Self-analysis** - go through your previous writing and look at your corrections. Do you make the same spelling or grammar mistake? Are you using vocabulary enough? How are your best question types?



A little bit of extra practice.....

Read the tips for the writing exam again. There are 11 spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes. See if you can spot them! Answers on the next page.

A few useful things to remember when doing your writing exam

1- Always think of **WHO** and **WHAT** you're writing to and **WHY** you're writing. This establishes **REGISTER, STYLE AND LAYOUT** and **PURPOSE** of what you're writing.

2 – Make sure to include enough key vocabulary. A lot of students lose marks this way. If the question asks you to write an article about travelling, you have to include things like *return ticket, luggage, delayed flight* and so on.

3- After a conjunction, **USE A GERUND!!!**

4 – After a preposition **USE A GERUND!!!**

5 - After an adjective **USE TO + INFINITIVE!!!**

6 – BE CAREFUL with subject and verb agreement e.g. people ARE, there IS a house, everyone LOVES, most schools ARE etc.

7 - **NEVER** do this – *I like painting, cooking, listening to music.....!!!!* We don't list that way in English. It needs to be like this - *I like painting, cooking AND listening to music*

8 – **homework, advice, luggage, toast, news, research, equipment and furniture** are **ALL UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS** in English

9 – Don't make up words!!! If you don't know the word you want to use, think of a different way to say it. Spanglish is a wonderful language but not suitable for your Cambridge exam!

10 – Don't copy all the language in the question. Try to use your own words as much as possible.

ANSWERS



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Corrections

- 1) Which
- 2) practising
- 3) writing
- 4) think
- 5) are
- 6) familiar
- 7) should WITHOUT TO!
- 8) plans – no apostrophe
- 9) these
- 10) enough vocabulary
- 11) What