English Language Entrance Requirements

What should we be testing?

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Or: The Stranglehold of SELTs on UK HEIs
Role of SELTs

Language Proficiency

Home Office Compliance
SELTS: An Overview

CEFR Levels
- A1: Basic User
- A2: Independent User
- B1: Proficient User
- B2: Breakthrough
- B2: Waystage
- C1: Threshold
- C2: Vantage
- C2: EOP
- C2: Mastery

Home Office
UK Border Agency
The following is the list of Secure English Language Tests that have been assessed as meeting the Home Office’s requirements from 1 August 2014. Further information can be found in the following pages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Language Test</th>
<th>Cambridge English Language Assessment</th>
<th>City and Guilds</th>
<th>Pearson</th>
<th>Trinity College London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge English Key (also known as Key English Test)</td>
<td>Cambridge English Preliminary (also known as Preliminary English Test)</td>
<td>City &amp; Guilds International Speaking and Listening IESOL Diploma at A1 level</td>
<td>Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic)</td>
<td>Integrated Skills in English (ISE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge English First (also known as First Certificate in English)</td>
<td>Cambridge English Advanced (also known as Certificate in Advanced English)</td>
<td>City &amp; Guilds International ESOL (IESOL) Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>Graded Examination in Spoken English (GESE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge English Proficiency (also known as Certificate of Proficiency in English)</td>
<td>Cambridge English Business Preliminary (also known as Business English Certificate Preliminary)</td>
<td>City &amp; Guilds IESOL together with ISESOL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge English Vantage (also known as Business English Certificate Vantage)</td>
<td>Cambridge English Business higher (also known as Business English Certificate Higher)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridge English Legal (also known as International Legal English certificate)</td>
<td>Cambridge English Financial (also known as International Certificate in Financial English)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Skills for Life Entry 1</td>
<td>ESOL Skills for Life Entry 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL Skills for Life Entry 3</td>
<td>ESOL Skills for Life Level 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL Skills for Life Level 2</td>
<td>IELTS (Academic and General Training)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

22 SELTs of which 16 are valid at B2.

Of these, 5 are for Specific Purposes, 9 are General English, and 2 ACADEMIC.
Valid from 6th April 2015...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Standardised benchmark</td>
<td>- ‘Teaching to the test’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Globally accessible</td>
<td>- Unauthentic task types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Secure</td>
<td>- Ability scale range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relative degree of validity</td>
<td>- General vs Academic English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relative degree of reliability</td>
<td>- ‘Testing the test’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generalizable results</td>
<td>- Not discipline- or institution-specific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ‘Academic Three’

IELTS

PTE | PEARSON TEST OF ENGLISH Academic

UKBA | Highly Trusted Sponsor

ETS | TOEFL

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
In the test that supposedly sets the standard of academic English, the task types in the two key active skills can hardly be said to be academic in nature — nor indeed, for that matter, authentic.
The PTE Academic dispenses with humans completely in that the entire test is marked by computer.

Not only a question as to the reliability of the marking but, again, far more a question of ‘testing the test’ and not the ‘student.’
POI about the Pearson PTE...
Like the new Pearson Test of Academic English, TOEFL iBT dispense with an actual human for the speaking section and instead the students speak to a computer. Again, unauthentic but far more a question of ‘testing the test’ and not the ‘student.’
Institution-specific tests

**ADVANTAGES**

- Tailored to Fit

**DISADVANTAGES**

- UKBA
- Highly Trusted Sponsor
But what do we actually want assessed?
Factors to consider...

Entrance Level

Entry Point

Degree Level
International Students...

Made up 14% of full-time first degree students and 13% of all first degree students.

Made up 70% of full-time taught postgraduates and 46% of all taught postgraduates.

Made up 48% of full-time research degree students and 41% of all research postgraduates.
So, what should we be testing?

- a composite of the generic, transferable skills that are required of and developed by academic study and research.*

*Source: http://www.essex.ac.uk/skillscentre/academic_literacy/
Current position:

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE

Tested in the SELT (?)

English Language Proficiency

Attested for by previous educational achievement

Subject-specific Knowledge

Academic (English) Skills
Why?

The student may have had no formal training in HE English prior to their application. This is arguably somewhat less of a concern for UG students, but it is a very important consideration for PG students, especially those on one-year courses...
International Student Challenges

- **Unclear expectations**: don’t know the ‘rules’
- Lack required **background knowledge**
- **Language** and **assessment** issues
- Difficulties **participating** and making **friends**
- Know they are seen as a ‘**problem**’
- Do achieve well but need **support**
- **Achievement gap** in some areas
- **Less satisfied** than UK students overall

Source: J.Ryan, Presentation to Russell Group in Sept/2011
Outstanding Issues

• 3 phases of ‘shock’ – culture shock, language shock, academic shock (latter may persist)
• Lack of understanding of limitations of IELTS
• Current ‘frontloading’ or ‘add on’ leads to ‘deficit’ approach
• Takes responsibility away from academics - ‘someone else’s problem’
• Lack of connection with foundation EAP/programmes
• Not embedded within discipline, extra costs
• Focus on technical skills, e.g. paraphrasing, plagiarism

Source: J.Ryan, Presentation to Russell Group in Sept/2011
Key Points – UK Situation

• Mainly **postgraduates** – shorter, more intense

• **PGs have less support** from lecturers – ‘academic shock’

• Less continuous assessment, more summative – **fewer opportunities for feedback**, support needs to be built in

• Harder to make local friends – UK counterparts less mobile (11:1, *OECD*, 2011)

• **Complacency** – ‘*they come here for a British education*’

Source: J.Ryan, Presentation to Russell Group in Sept/2011
Key Points – Academic Staff

- Increased support services for IS but little change in teaching and learning approaches
- Misconceptions about IS learning needs – rote learners, lack critical thinking skills, prone to plagiarism
- Don’t consider teaching, learning and assessment factors and role of previous expectations
- May conflate lack of language proficiency with lack of ability
- Don’t understand the complexities of language learning
- Awareness of the influence of cultural and linguistic backgrounds on writing

Source: J.Ryan, Presentation to Russell Group in Sept/2011
In relation to this last point - Kaplan’s *doodles*

‘A *fallacy* of some repute and some duration is the one which assumes that because a student can write an adequate essay in his native language, he can necessarily write an adequate essay in a second language.’

“The material is all here, but it somehow seems out of focus”, or “Lacks organisation”, or “Lacks cohesion”.

‘The foreign-student paper is out of focus because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader.’

• But what are these ‘expectations of the native reader’?
• Where have they come from?
• How can an L2 student adopt them?
Any student who has good general English language skills necessarily has the academic English skills set required at university.
What we do at Cambridge

- Postgraduate Entry
- Visiting Students
- Medical Electives
- ERASMUS
- ICE MSt
- ICE Dip/Cert
- ICE ISS

[ca. 1500 per annum]
The Cambridge Assessment

- General Academic English Ability
- Discipline-specific Academic English Ability
- Core Academic Skills (e.g. Critical Thinking / Analysis / Synthesis / Reflection)
- Academic Objectivity
- Core Language Accuracy and Fluency within an academic environment
INPUT: Two academic articles on critical thinking to act as the basis for a written response.

INPUT: Extract from a Cambridge lecture which they have to summarise in writing.

An overview of their proposed research & a section of informal academic writing to be written more objectively, plus a self-assessment.

Their research; their motivations for choosing the MPhil course; any experiences overseas; any other questions that may come up.

INTEGRATED
Assessment

There is no specific score that the applicants are expected to achieve.

This is because there are no right or wrong answers to the assessment.

In recent years 'critical thinking' has become something of a 'buzz word' in educational circles. For many reasons, educators have become very interested in teaching 'thinking skills' of various kinds in contrast with teaching information and content. Of course, you can do both, but if the past emphasis in most people's teaching has been on teaching content - history, physics, geography or whatever - and, though many teachers would claim to teach their students 'how to think', most would say that they do this indirectly or implicitly in the course of teaching the content which belongs to their special subject. Increasingly, educators have come to doubt the effectiveness of teaching 'thinking skills' in this way, because most students simply do not pick up the thinking skills in question. The result is that many teachers have become interested in teaching these skills directly. This is what this test aims to do. It teaches a range of transferable thinking skills, but it does so explicitly and directly. The skills in question are critical thinking skills sometimes called 'life-long thinking skills', and they will be taught in a way that expressly aims to facilitate their transfer to other subjects and other contexts. If you learn, for example, how to structure an argument, judge the credibility of a source or make a decision, by the methods we shall explain in a few contexts, it will not be difficult to see how to do these things in many other contexts too; this is the sense in which the skills are 'transferable'.

[...]
## Assessment Criteria

### ONLINE
- Understanding of Written and Spoken Academic Input Material
- Clarity of Expression
- Fluency
- Accuracy
- Coherence and Cohesion
- Register
- Lexical and Grammatical Range and Ability
- Awareness of Academic Conventions

### TELEPHONE
- Ability to discuss own research area and related questions
- Ability to discuss non-academic topics
- Ability to react to both formal and informal questions
- Fluency
- Accuracy
- Intonation
- Pronunciation
- Lexical and Grammatical Range and Ability
And...

- Any previous English language proficiency test scores and the dates taken
- Previous English language experience
- Degree for which they have applied – i.e. one-year Master’s or PhD
At this level, we are not looking to assess *basic language competency*, as this should already be present. The format and focus of our assessment is designed to give an indication of an applicant’s *academic English ability* – and therefore it covers much more than language.

An applicant may have excellent general English ability, but it does not necessarily follow that they have the necessary *academic skills* set to do PG study/research at Cambridge.

This is what our assessment is intended to give an indication of.
Our interest for PG entry

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE

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Why?
So, UoCLC and ATS...

Test of Academic Literacy
What might it look like?

Broadly discipline-specific

2-3 input texts

Longer written responses

Reflective Awareness of the Process

Editing Process
Integrated Tasks ... with a focus on: 'discourse'
What could it be used for?

- Direct Entry
- As an Exit Test
- Integrated into EMI courses
"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."

~ Alexander Graham Bell
Less ‘proficiency’ more ‘preparatory’

3-hr high stakes litmus test

The Washback Effect
Let’s unpack the box...
Position of EAP within the University

EAP Best Practice across the Wider University

Better prepared for Study at UK HEIs

Support is embedded
Interested in getting involved?
Thank you for your attention.

And if you’re interested in getting involved, do get in touch:

ko201@cam.ac.uk
01223 335004
Any Questions?