



Syllabus

Cambridge O Level English Language 1123

Use this syllabus for exams in 2024, 2025 and 2026.
Exams are available in the June and November series.



Version 2

Please check the syllabus page at www.cambridgeinternational.org/1123
to see if this syllabus is available in your administrative zone.

For the purposes of screen readers, any mention in this document of Cambridge IGCSE
refers to Cambridge International General Certification of Secondary Education.

Why choose Cambridge International?

Cambridge International prepares school students for life, helping them develop an informed curiosity and a lasting passion for learning. We are part of the University of Cambridge.

Our Cambridge Pathway gives students a clear path for educational success from age 5 to 19. Schools can shape the curriculum around how they want students to learn – with a wide range of subjects and flexible ways to offer them. It helps students discover new abilities and a wider world, and gives them the skills they need for life, so they can achieve at school, university and work.

Our programmes and qualifications set the global standard for international education. They are created by subject experts, rooted in academic rigour and reflect the latest educational research. They provide a strong platform for learners to progress from one stage to the next, and are well supported by teaching and learning resources.

Our mission is to provide educational benefit through provision of international programmes and qualifications for school education and to be the world leader in this field. Together with schools, we develop Cambridge learners who are confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged – equipped for success in the modern world.

Every year, nearly a million Cambridge students from 10 000 schools in 160 countries prepare for their future with the Cambridge Pathway.

School feedback: ‘We think the Cambridge curriculum is superb preparation for university.’

Feedback from: Christoph Guttentag, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, Duke University, USA

Quality management



Cambridge International is committed to providing exceptional quality. In line with this commitment, our quality management system for the provision of international qualifications and education programmes for students aged 5 to 19 is independently certified as meeting the internationally recognised standard, ISO 9001:2015. Learn more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/ISO9001

Contents

Why choose Cambridge International?	2
1 Why choose this syllabus?	4
2 Syllabus overview	7
Aims	7
Content overview	8
Assessment overview	8
Assessment objectives	9
3 Subject content	10
Reading	10
Writing	10
4 Details of the assessment	11
Paper 1 – Reading	11
Paper 2 – Writing	12
Command words	14
5 What else you need to know	15
Before you start	15
Making entries	16
Accessibility and equality	16
After the exam	17
How students and teachers can use the grades	18
Grade descriptions	18
Changes to this syllabus for 2024, 2025 and 2026	19

Important: Changes to this syllabus

For information about changes to this syllabus for 2024, 2025 and 2026, go to page 19.

The latest syllabus is version 2, published December 2022.



1 Why choose this syllabus?

Key benefits

Cambridge O Level is typically for 14 to 16 year olds and is an internationally recognised qualification. It has been designed especially for an international market and is sensitive to the needs of different countries. Cambridge O Level is designed for learners whose first language may not be English, and this is acknowledged throughout the examination process.

Our programmes balance a thorough knowledge and understanding of a subject and help to develop the skills learners need for their next steps in education or employment.

Cambridge O Level English Language encourages learners to read a variety of texts and improve their use and style of language in a range of contexts. Learners develop the ability to understand and respond to what they read and to communicate effectively in writing. These skills equip them for progression to further study or employment.

Our approach in Cambridge O Level English Language encourages learners to be:

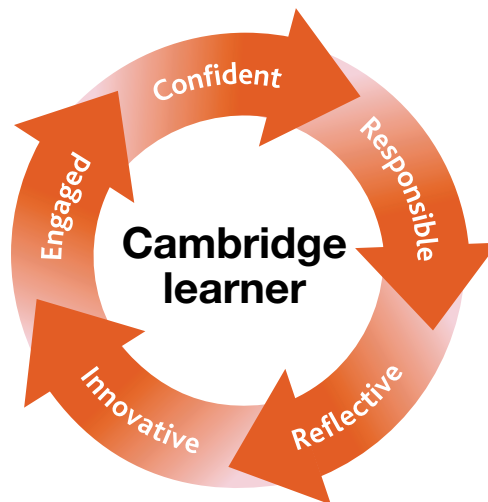
confident, exploring and evaluating ideas and arguments in a structured, critical and analytical way. They are able to communicate and defend views and opinions as well as respect those of others

responsible, understanding how to use English language in different contexts and for different purposes to influence and affect the world around them

reflective, critically reviewing their own work and identifying ways to improve. They develop successful learning strategies to consolidate their skills

innovative, applying their knowledge and understanding to engage with a range of texts and styles of writing. They adapt their skills in order to respond to tasks in different contexts

engaged, taking inspiration from, and being interested in, the variety of language around them. They read critically, learn from others and understand how their English Language learning fits within the wider context.



School feedback: ‘Cambridge O Level has helped me develop thinking and analytical skills which will go a long way in helping me with advanced studies.’

Feedback from: Kamal Khan Virk, former student at Beaconhouse Garden Town Secondary School, Pakistan, who went on to study Actuarial Science at the London School of Economics

International recognition and acceptance

Our expertise in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment is the basis for the recognition of our programmes and qualifications around the world. The combination of knowledge and skills in Cambridge O Level English Language gives learners a solid foundation for further study. Candidates who achieve grades A* to C are well prepared to follow a wide range of courses including Cambridge International AS & A Level English.

Cambridge O Levels are accepted and valued by leading universities and employers around the world as evidence of academic achievement. Many universities require a combination of Cambridge International AS & A Levels and Cambridge O Levels or equivalent to meet their entry requirements.

Learn more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition

Supporting teachers

We provide a wide range of resources, detailed guidance and innovative training and professional development so that you can give your students the best possible preparation for Cambridge O Level. To find out which resources are available for each syllabus go to our School Support Hub.

The School Support Hub is our secure online site for Cambridge teachers where you can find the resources you need to deliver our programmes. You can also keep up to date with your subject and the global Cambridge community through our online discussion forums.

Find out more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/support

Support for Cambridge O Level			
Planning and preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next steps guides. • Schemes of work. • Specimen papers. • Syllabuses. • Teacher guides. 	Teaching and assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsed resources. • Online forums. • Support for coursework and speaking tests. 	Learning and revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example candidate responses. • Past papers and mark schemes. • Specimen paper answers. 	Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate Results Service. • Principal examiner reports for teachers. • Results Analysis.

Sign up for email notifications about changes to syllabuses, including new and revised products and services at www.cambridgeinternational.org/syllabusupdates

Professional development

We support teachers through:

- Introductory Training – face-to-face or online
- Extension Training – face-to-face or online
- Enrichment Professional Development – face-to-face or online

Find out more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/events

- Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications

Find out more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/profdev



Supporting exams officers

We provide comprehensive support and guidance for all Cambridge exams officers.

Find out more at: www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

2 Syllabus overview

Aims

The aims describe the purposes of a course based on this syllabus.

The aims are to enable students to:

- read a wide range of texts, fluently and with good understanding, enjoying and appreciating a variety of language
- read critically, and use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write accurately and effectively, using standard English appropriately
- work with information and with ideas in language by developing skills of evaluation, analysis, use and inference
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary, alongside a knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology and linguistic conventions.



Cambridge Assessment International Education is an education organisation and politically neutral.

The contents of this syllabus, examination papers and associated materials do not endorse any political view. We endeavour to treat all aspects of the exam process neutrally.

Content overview

Cambridge O Level English Language offers candidates the opportunity to respond with understanding to a rich array of reading texts during the course as a whole. Candidates will use these texts to inform and inspire their own writing, and write in a range of text types for different purposes and audiences.

The reading texts cover a range of genres and types, including fiction and non-fiction, and may also include other forms of writing, such as essays, reviews and articles.

Candidates are encouraged to become appreciative and critical readers and writers of English.

Assessment overview

All candidates take two components. Candidates will be eligible for grades A* to E.

All candidates take:		and:	
Paper 1	2 hours	Paper 2	2 hours
Reading	50%	Writing	50%
50 marks		50 marks	
Structured and extended writing questions		Directed writing question and a composition task	
Questions are based on two reading texts		Externally assessed	
Externally assessed			

Information on availability is in the **Before you start** section.

Assessment objectives

The assessment objectives (AOs) are:

AO1 Reading

Candidates will be assessed on their ability to:

- R1 demonstrate understanding of explicit meanings
- R2 demonstrate understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes
- R3 analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions, using appropriate support from the text
- R4 demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve effects and influence readers
- R5 select and use information for specific purposes.

AO2 Writing

Candidates will be assessed on their ability to:

- W1 articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined
- W2 organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect
- W3 use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context
- W4 use register appropriate to context
- W5 make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Weighting for assessment objectives

The approximate weightings allocated to each of the assessment objectives (AOs) are summarised below.

Assessment objectives as a percentage of the qualification

Assessment objective	Weighting in O Level %
AO1 Reading	50
AO2 Writing	50
Total	100

Assessment objectives as a percentage of each component

Assessment objective	Weighting in components %	
	Paper 1	Paper 2
AO1 Reading	80	20
AO2 Writing	20	80
Total	100	100

3 Subject content

This syllabus gives you the flexibility to design a course that will interest, challenge and engage your learners. Where appropriate you are responsible for selecting texts, resources and examples to support your learners' study. These should be appropriate for the learners' age, cultural background and learning context as well as complying with your school policies and local legal requirements.

The skills covered in the syllabus are outlined below.

Reading

- demonstrate understanding of written texts, and of the words and phrases within them
- summarise and use material for a specific context
- develop, analyse and evaluate facts, ideas and opinions
- demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve their effects and influence readers
- select appropriate information for specific purposes
- recognise and respond to linguistic devices, figurative language and imagery.

To develop reading skills, students should engage with a range of genres and text types from the twentieth and/or twenty-first centuries, including literature, fiction and non-fiction. Other forms of Reading should include blogs, essays, reviews or articles, short stories in their entirety or extracts from a longer work of prose or drama. Learning should include focus on writers' use of language and style and the ways in which writers achieve effects and influence readers. Students should study how influence may include facts, ideas, perspectives, opinions and bias.

Writing

- express what is thought, felt and imagined
- organise and convey facts, ideas and opinions effectively
- demonstrate a varied vocabulary appropriate to the context
- demonstrate an effective use of sentence structures
- demonstrate an understanding of audience, purpose and form
- demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

As developing writers themselves, students should be introduced to a range of writing skills, including the ability to create and compose texts with a variety of forms and purposes, e.g. descriptive, narrative, argumentative and persuasive. Learning should include focus on the following text types: email, letter, report, article, speech, and summary.

4 Details of the assessment

Paper 1 – Reading

Written paper, 2 hours, 50 marks

Candidates answer **all** the questions in two compulsory sections. Candidates write their answers in the space provided on the question paper.

The texts are printed in the question paper insert.

Dictionaries must **not** be used.

Section A Comprehension and Use of Language (25 marks)

Question 1 Comprehension task

Candidates respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A, a narrative text. These are short answers testing understanding of both explicit and implicit meanings.

Text A is approximately 900 words long and is from either the twentieth or the twenty-first century.

This question tests the following reading assessment objectives (16 marks):

- R1 demonstrate understanding of explicit meanings
- R2 demonstrate understanding of implicit meanings and attitude.

Question 2 Use of Language task

Candidates respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A. These are short answers worth a total of nine marks relating to the author's use of language and the effect this has.

This question tests the following reading assessment objective (9 marks):

- R4 demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve effects and influence readers.

Section B Summary and Short response (25 marks)

Question 3a Summary task

Candidates answer a summary task in response to Text B. Candidates write a summary as continuous writing of no more than 150 words.

Text B is approximately 550–600 words long.

This question tests the following reading assessment objectives (10 marks):

- R1 demonstrate understanding of explicit meanings
- R5 select and use information for specific purposes.

This question also tests the following writing assessment objectives (10 marks):

- W2 organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect
- W3 use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

Question 3b Short response task

Candidates give a short response to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to Text B.

This question tests the following reading assessment objective (5 marks):

R2 demonstrate understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes.

Paper 2 – Writing

Written paper, 2 hours, 50 marks

Candidates answer **two** questions, one from section A and one from section B.

The texts are printed on the question paper.

Dictionaries must **not** be used.

Section A Directed Writing (25 marks)

Candidates answer **one** compulsory question.

Candidates read one or two texts totalling approximately 400–450 words in length. They use, develop and evaluate the information in the text(s) to create a discursive/argumentative/ persuasive speech, email, report, letter or article.

Candidates write about 250–350 words.

This question tests the following writing assessment objectives (15 marks):

W1 articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined

W2 organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect

W3 use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context

W4 use register appropriate to context

W5 make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

This question also tests the following reading assessment objectives (10 marks):

R3 analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions, using appropriate support from the text

R5 select and use information for specific purposes.

Section B Composition (25 marks)

Candidates answer **one** question from a choice of four: two descriptive and two narrative.

Candidates develop and write a composition.

Candidates write about 350–450 words.

This question tests the following writing assessment objectives (25 marks):

W1 articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined

W2 organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect

W3 use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context

W5 make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Descriptive:

A descriptive piece of writing describes a person, place or situation (including atmosphere) in detail so that the reader can picture it.

Narrative:

A narrative piece of writing tells a story containing a sequence of connected events which may be real or imaginary.

Command words

Command words and their meanings help candidates know what is expected from them in the exam. The table below includes command words used in the assessment for this syllabus. The use of the command word will relate to the subject context.

Command word	What it means
Consider	review and respond to given information
Describe	state the points of a topic / give characteristics and main features
Evaluate	judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount, or value of something
Explain	set out purposes or reasons / make the relationships between things clear / say why and/or how and support with relevant evidence
Give	produce an answer from a given source or recall/memory
Identify	name/select/recognise
Summarise	select and present the main points, without detail

5 What else you need to know

This section is an overview of other information you need to know about this syllabus. It will help to share the administrative information with your exams officer so they know when you will need their support. Find more information about our administrative processes at www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

Before you start

Previous study

We recommend that learners starting this course should have studied an English language curriculum such as the Cambridge Lower Secondary programme or equivalent national educational framework.

Guided learning hours

We design Cambridge O Level syllabuses based on learners having about 130 guided learning hours for each subject during the course but this is for guidance only. The number of hours a learner needs to achieve the qualification may vary according to local practice and their previous experience of the subject.

Availability and timetables

Cambridge O Levels are available to centres in administrative zones 3, 4 and 5.

You can enter candidates in the June and November exam series. You can view the timetable for your administrative zone at www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables

Check you are using the syllabus for the year the candidate is taking the exam.

Private candidates can enter for this syllabus. For more information, please refer to the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*.

Combining with other syllabuses

Candidates can take this syllabus alongside other Cambridge International syllabuses in a single exam series. The only exceptions are:

- Cambridge IGCSE First Language English (0500)
- Cambridge IGCSE First Language English (9–1) (0990)
- Cambridge IGCSE First Language English (US) (0524)
- Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language (count-in speaking) (0511)
- Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language (Speaking endorsement) (0510)
- Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language (Speaking endorsement) (9–1) (0993)
- Cambridge IGCSE English as an Additional Language (0472)
- Cambridge IGCSE English as an Additional Language (9–1) (0772)
- Cambridge O Level English Language (Malaysia) (1119)
- Cambridge O Level English Language (Brunei) (1120)
- Cambridge O Level English Language (Mauritius) (1125)
- Cambridge O Level English Language Syllabus B (Mauritius) (1126)
- Cambridge O Level English Language (Singapore) (1128)
- syllabuses with the same title at the same level.

Entries for Cambridge O Level English Language **MUST** use the following codes:

- Entries in **Brunei** *must* enter for **Subject code 1120**
- Entries in **Mauritius** *must* enter for **Subject code 1125** or **1126**
- Entries in **Singapore** *must* enter for **Subject code 1128**
- Entries elsewhere *must* enter for **Subject code 1123**.

Cambridge O Level, Cambridge IGCSE™ and Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) syllabuses are at the same level.

Making entries

Exams officers are responsible for submitting entries to Cambridge International. We encourage them to work closely with you to make sure they enter the right number of candidates for the right combination of syllabus components. Entry option codes and instructions for submitting entries are in the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*. Your exams officer has a copy of this guide.

Exam administration

To keep our exams secure, we produce question papers for different areas of the world, known as administrative zones. We allocate all Cambridge schools to one administrative zone determined by their location. Each zone has a specific timetable. Some of our syllabuses offer candidates different assessment options. An entry option code is used to identify the components the candidate will take relevant to the administrative zone and the available assessment options.

Support for exams officers

We know how important exams officers are to the successful running of exams. We provide them with the support they need to make your entries on time. Your exams officer will find this support, and guidance for all other phases of the Cambridge Exams Cycle, at www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

Retakes

Candidates can retake the whole qualification as many times as they want to. Information on retake entries is at www.cambridgeinternational.org/entries

Language

This syllabus and the related assessment materials are available in English only.

Accessibility and equality

Syllabus and assessment design

Cambridge International works to avoid direct or indirect discrimination in our syllabuses and assessment materials. We aim to maximise inclusivity for candidates of all national, cultural or social backgrounds and with other protected characteristics. In addition, the language and layout used are designed to make our materials as accessible as possible. This gives all learners the opportunity, as fairly as possible, to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding and helps to minimise the requirement to make reasonable adjustments during the assessment process.

Access arrangements

Access arrangements (including modified papers) are the principal way in which Cambridge International complies with our duty, as guided by the UK Equality Act (2010), to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for candidates with special educational needs (SEN), disability, illness or injury. Where a candidate would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to a candidate with no SEN, disability, illness or injury, we may be able to agree pre-examination access arrangements. These arrangements help a candidate by minimising accessibility barriers and maximising their opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in an assessment.

Important:

- Requested access arrangements should be based on evidence of the candidate’s barrier to assessment and should also reflect their normal way of working at school; this is in line with *The Cambridge Handbook* www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide
- For Cambridge International to approve an access arrangement, we will need to agree that it constitutes a reasonable adjustment, involves reasonable cost and timeframe and does not affect the security and integrity of the assessment.
- Availability of access arrangements should be checked by centres at the start of the course. Details of our standard access arrangements and modified question papers are available in *The Cambridge Handbook* www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide
- Please contact us at the start of the course to find out if we are able to approve an arrangement that is not included in the list of standard access arrangements.
- Candidates who cannot access parts of the assessment may be able to receive an award based on the parts they have completed.

Some access arrangements are not allowed in this syllabus because they affect the assessment objective:

- candidates are not allowed to use voice-activated software to dictate their written work
- human readers are not allowed.

After the exam

Grading and reporting

Grades A*, A, B, C, D or E indicate the standard a candidate achieved at Cambridge O Level.

A* is the highest and E is the lowest. ‘Ungraded’ means that the candidate’s performance did not meet the standard required for grade E. ‘Ungraded’ is reported on the statement of results but not on the certificate.

In specific circumstances your candidates may see one of the following letters on their statement of results:

- Q (PENDING)
- X (NO RESULT).

These letters do not appear on the certificate.

On the statement of results and certificates, Cambridge O Level is shown as GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (GCE O LEVEL).

How students and teachers can use the grades

Assessment at Cambridge O Level has two purposes:

- to measure learning and achievement

The assessment:

- confirms achievement and performance in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the syllabus, to the levels described in the grade descriptions.

- to show likely future success

The outcomes:

- help predict which students are well prepared for a particular course or career and/or which students are more likely to be successful
- help students choose the most suitable course or career.

Grade descriptions

Grade descriptions are provided to give an indication of the standards of achievement candidates awarded particular grades are likely to show. Weakness in one aspect of the examination may be balanced by a better performance in some other aspect.

Grade descriptions for Cambridge O Level English Language will be published after the first assessment of the syllabus in 2024. Find more information at www.cambridgeinternational.org/olevel

Changes to this syllabus for 2024, 2025 and 2026

The syllabus has been reviewed and revised for first examination in 2024.

The latest syllabus is version 2, published December 2022.

You must read the whole syllabus before planning your teaching programme.

Changes to syllabus version 2, published December 2022

Changes to assessment (including changes to specimen papers)	<p>Paper 1 Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A change has been made to the word count for Question 3a Summary task. <p>Candidates are now required to write a summary of no more than 150 words.</p>
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Changes to syllabus version 1, published September 2021

Changes to syllabus content	<p>Aims and assessment objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The syllabus aims and assessment objectives have been updated. The wording of the assessment objectives has been revised to make them more concise. The assessment objectives continue to test the same knowledge and skills. <p>Subject content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The syllabus content has been updated to reflect current educational thinking and practice. A list of command words has been added to the syllabus.
Changes to assessment (including changes to specimen papers)	<p>The order of the question papers has changed to: Paper 1 Reading and Paper 2 Writing.</p> <p>Paper 1 Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is more integration of skills in the paper with 80% assessment of Reading and 20% assessment of Writing. There are two reading texts, printed in an insert. Section A assesses Comprehension and Use of Language, and Section B assesses Summary writing and a short response task. The summary task has changed. Please read the syllabus and specimen papers for details. There is a new question assessing understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes (5 marks). Questions are short answer and extended response. The marking criteria have been updated. The duration of Paper 1 Reading is 2 hours.

continued

**Changes to assessment
(including changes
to specimen papers)
continued****Paper 2 Writing**

- There is more integration of skills in the paper with 80% assessment of Writing and 20% assessment of Reading.
- Candidates must now write in two different styles. In Section A Directed Writing, candidates write an argumentative/discursive style essay. In Section B Composition, there is a choice between descriptive or narrative writing.
- The Directed Writing includes stimulus reading text(s).
- The marking criteria have been updated.
- The number of marks for the paper is 50.
- The duration of the paper is 2 hours.

In addition to reading the syllabus, you should refer to the updated specimen assessment materials. The specimen papers will help your students become familiar with exam requirements and command words in questions. The specimen mark schemes explain how students should answer questions to meet the assessment objectives.

Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2024 are suitable for use with this syllabus.



We are committed to making our documents accessible in accordance with the WCAG 2.1 Standard. We're always looking to improve the accessibility of our documents. If you find any problems or you think we're not meeting accessibility requirements, contact us at **info@cambridgeinternational.org** with the subject heading: Digital accessibility. If you need this document in a different format, contact us and supply your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.

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