

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations

Business English Certificates

Information for Candidates

BEC HIGHER



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE
ESOL Examinations

English for Speakers of Other Languages

Information for Candidates – BEC Higher

Why take BEC?

More than ever, you need a good knowledge of English to succeed in international business and commerce. If you can show you have relevant language skills, you'll have a great advantage in the jobs market and more choice if you want to work or study abroad.

The Business English Certificates (BEC) from Cambridge ESOL have been created specifically for individual learners who wish to obtain a business-related English language qualification. By taking an internationally recognised business qualification like BEC, you can show that you have learned English to an appropriate standard and can use it in a professional context.

BEC is available at three levels: BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage and BEC Higher. BEC Higher is set at Level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Why take a Cambridge ESOL exam?

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) offers the world's leading range of qualifications for learners and teachers of English. Around 1.75 million people in over 135 countries take Cambridge ESOL exams every year.

- **Develop effective communication skills**

The Cambridge ESOL examinations cover all four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. They include a range of tasks which assess your ability to use English, so that you develop the full range of skills you need to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

- **Worldwide recognition**

Universities and employers all over the world recognise Cambridge ESOL exams as a measure of your achievement in English. Whether you are hoping to study architecture in Australia or work in IT in Italy, a Cambridge ESOL examination is a valuable stamp in your passport to success.

- **Quality you can trust**

We do extensive research and trialling to make sure that you get the fairest, most accurate assessment of your ability and that our exams are most relevant to the range of uses for which you need English.

Preparing for BEC

If you would like more practice material to help you prepare for BEC Higher, there are past paper packs available to buy which include an audio CD of the listening test. You can find more information, prices and details of how to order on our website at:

www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/pastpapers.htm

What does BEC Higher involve?

This booklet is a brief introduction to BEC Higher. If you would like to see a full sample paper for BEC Higher, you can download one from our website at:

www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/dloads/bec_downloads.htm

The table below shows the different parts of BEC Higher and how long each paper takes.

<i>Name of paper</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Reading	6 parts/52 items	1 hour	25%
Writing	2 tasks	1 hour 10 minutes	25%
Listening	3 parts/30 items	about 40 minutes including transfer time	25%
Speaking	3 parts	16 minutes (2:2 format*)	25%

* 2 examiners, 2 candidates (2:3 format is used for the last group in a session where necessary)

■ Reading

Time: 1 hour

The Reading paper is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One (8 questions)

This is a matching task involving either a single text or five related shorter texts. There are also eight sentences and you have to match each one to one of the texts. You should read the sentence and then read the texts quickly to try to find the one which matches. The language of the sentence will be different from the language of the text, so you need to make sure that you have understood the meaning.

In the example below, there are some statements (1–4) about organisations which outsource (OWOs). These are organisations which give contracts for some of their activities to be run by managed service suppliers (MSSs). There are then five extracts from an article about OWOs. You have to decide which extract (A, B, C, D or E) matches each of the statements. In the exam, there are four more statements like the ones below, so there will be more statements than extracts and you will need to use each extract more than once.

- 1 There is a risk that outsourcing too many operations could weaken an OWO.
- 2 OWOs are finding that they need to adapt their management methods as a result of the increased outsourcing they commission.
- 3 There are different ways of assessing the total financial worth of outsourced business.
- 4 There may be improvements for an OWO's staff when it outsources services.

A

Basic activities such as catering, cleaning and security were often the first to be contracted out as both the private and public sectors yielded to the 1990s' philosophy of concentrating on core activities. As a result of outsourcing, many canteens have lost their institutional atmosphere and resemble high-street retail outlets, boosting both the range of products and facilities for workers and the MSSs' turnover. Profits from the growing UK outsourcing market are helping the biggest catering MSSs to expand overseas as the industry develops a global dimension.

B

Estimates of the scope and value of managed service supplying vary according to the definitions used of what activities are included or excluded in calculations. Although some MSSs are large – for example, the Alfa Group is, with 200,000 employees, one of the ten biggest private sector employers in Europe – they enjoy little of the public name recognition of the OWOs for whom they work. At the same time, in fields such as IT and research, OWOs now outsource not only non-core activities but also those where they believe specialist MSSs can bring additional expertise.

C

The growth of outsourcing means that a number of MSSs are finding themselves drawn into the established managerial thinking of their OWOs to a point where their reputation becomes dependent on the OWO's performance – in both positive and negative ways. This and other consequences of growth are generating calls from MSSs for both the private sector and governments to think more strategically about their relationship with MSSs, rather than on a disjointed contract-by-contract basis.

D

There are signs that the spread of contracting out to MSSs is impacting on the way OWOs are run, generating a need for high-level staff who will be skilled at negotiating and handling relationships with partner organisations rather than simply giving internal directions. Meanwhile, many MSSs face new employment and recruitment issues as their workforces often consist of staff inherited from dozens of organisations in both the public and private sectors.

E

The growth in outsourcing has coincided – and may continue to coincide – with increasing interest in the concept of the virtual organisation – one which chooses to outsource almost everything so that it can concentrate on handling relationships with its clients. However, a recent report warns that the notion of virtual organisations must be balanced against the negative possibility of 'hollow' organisations, left with only a 'fragile shell remaining'. The report also expresses concern that some large MSSs have 'gradually taken control of significant parts of public sector activities', changing the basis on which the success or otherwise of those activities is assessed.

Part Two (6 questions)

This is a gapped text with six sentence-length gaps. You have to read the text and then identify the correct sentence to fill each gap from a set of eight sentences.

The example below is part of an article about how companies' decision-making can go wrong. Six sentences are missing (9–14) and you have to choose the best sentence from the eight sentences following the text (A–H) to fill each of the numbered gaps. There is an example at the beginning (0) which has been done for you.

Bad business decisions are easy to make

Those who make disastrous business decisions generally exhibit two characteristic types of behaviour. First they make a selective interpretation of the evidence when deciding to go ahead with a project. (0) ...H...

How do such bad decisions come about? One reason is that the people in control are determined to make their mark by doing something dramatic. (9) ... Once the leader has decided to put his or her name to a project, many in the organisation believe it politic to support it too, whatever their private doubts. (10) ... These doubters know that such a perception will cloud their future careers. The desire to agree with the boss is typical of committees, with group members often taking collective decisions that they would not have taken individually. They look around the table, see their colleagues nodding in agreement and suppress their own doubts. If all these intelligent people believe this is the right thing to do, they think to themselves, perhaps it is. It rarely occurs to committee members that all their colleagues have made the same dubious calculation.

Responsible managers usually ask to see the evidence before reaching a decision. (11) ... Even those who consider all the evidence, good and bad, fail to take account of the fact that expert predictions are often wrong. The reason for this is that feedback is only effective if it is received quickly and often, and senior executives rarely become the experts they claim to be, because they make too few big decisions to learn much from them. So when it becomes clear that disaster looms, many executives insist on pressing ahead regardless. (12) ... The repercussions of doing so can be daunting.

So what can be done to prevent companies making bad decisions? (13) ... Another is to delegate the decision on whether or not to continue to people who are not in the thick of the decision-making, such as the non-executive directors. (14) ... But they shouldn't expect any gratitude: people who have made large mistakes are not going to say 'Thank you, we should have paid attention to you in the first place.'

- A It would be far better, though, if dissidents in the organisation raised their doubts beforehand, and were listened to.
- B They want to be recognised as having changed the company in a way that history will remember.
- C This is not to argue that companies should never attempt anything brave or risky.
- D Too much money has been spent and too many reputations are at stake to think about stopping at this stage.
- E One solution is to set targets for a project and to agree in advance to abandon it if these are not met.
- F After all, people who persistently point to potential pitfalls are seen as negative and disloyal.
- G But they often rely only on those parts of it that support their case.
- H Coupled with this, they insist that the failure was someone else's fault.

Part Three (6 questions)

This task consists of a text followed by six questions or incomplete statements. For each question or incomplete statement you have to choose from four possible answers.

In this example, you should read the extract below from an article about incompetent employees. Then try to answer the questions (15–17) by choosing A, B, C or D. In the exam, there are three more questions like the ones below.

Every organisation has its share of employees-from-hell: the lazy, deluded, hypochondriac underperformers. They are difficult to manage and miserable to work with. Their productivity is low and their ability to poison staff morale high. They are, alas, always well-entrenched and management-resistant. Interestingly, their numbers in any organisation have more to do with management's refusal to deal with the situation than with poor selection. That is, their existence in the organisation is nearly always due to a long line of weak managers who have declined to tackle the problem.

Traditionally, there are three classic ineffective ways of dealing with the incompetent. The first is to ignore the problem, hoping that it will go away. Rather than confront laziness or serious absenteeism, the manager gives the employee less work to do. This inevitably leads to frustration on the part of the good hardworking staff who see the problem employee getting away with it.

The second approach, which has traditionally been the most favoured, is to pass them on. There is usually a part of any business where people believe the poor performer can do no damage. Alternatively, poor performers can be moved to another branch in the dreariest part of town, or to another town, or even to another country. A clever variant of this tactic is to herd all the incompetent employees into one part of the company that is then sold off or privatised.

There is a third approach which is to promote the incompetent. This sounds bizarre and exceedingly stupid but is not infrequently adopted. The idea is that, although these posts are quite senior and well-paid, the actual jobs are fairly pointless ones in which incompetent people can hide without doing any serious damage. The employee is thus confirmed in his or her delusions of competence.

.....

15 What criticism does the writer make of managers in the first paragraph?

- A** They lose interest in the issue of incompetent employees.
- B** They fail to take a firm line with inefficient employees.
- C** They have little idea of what is really required of their staff.
- D** They often make bad decisions when choosing new staff.

16 What is the effect of the first of the methods suggested for dealing with incompetent staff?

- A** It has only a short-term effect on the problem.
- B** It means that better workers will not have to work so hard.
- C** It makes good workers aware that problems are being dealt with.
- D** It sends a negative message to those who do their job well.

17 In both the second and third ineffective methods of dealing with incompetent employees, the managers' aim is to

- A** have all of the incompetent staff working in the same part of the company.
- B** improve the attitude of the incompetent staff to work by giving them promotion.
- C** put the incompetent staff in a situation where they can do as little harm as possible.
- D** make the work so unattractive that the incompetent staff want to leave.

Part Four (10 questions)

In this task, you have a text with ten missing words. After the text, there are ten questions, most of which test vocabulary. For each question, your task is to choose the correct option from the four available choices (A, B, C or D) to fill each gap.

In the example below, you have to read an article about life coaching – regular meetings between a business person and a neutral consultant to discuss work-related problems. Try to answer the questions (21–25). In the exam, there are five more questions like the ones below.

Anyone who has ever glanced through a self-improvement book has probably learned that such books do not hold the **(21)** of personal happiness. Having read too many of them without success, I was **(22)** to staying vaguely dissatisfied for the rest of my life. But when I **(23)** a newspaper article about a new kind of consultant, called a life coach, I became curious, and decided to learn more.

I was looking for a more personal way to **(24)** my life: I'd achieved my material goals before **(25)** the support of a coach, but professional challenges, long hours and not having someone neutral to talk to were putting my work and relationships at **(26)** I realised I needed to learn how to deal with problems before they occurred.

My life coach is very good at asking me **(27)** questions which help me to discover what I'm dissatisfied with in my life, and to understand who I am. It's good to have someone you can trust and respect to **(28)** things over with.

I sometimes pick topics in **(29)** of our discussions, such as situations at work, or conflicts between me and colleagues, though I don't always **(30)** an agenda. And I know that everything I say to my coach is in the strictest confidence. I'm far better at tackling difficult situations now, and best of all, I feel much more at ease with my life.

- | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 21 | A solution | B answer | C key | D secret |
| 22 | A patient | B resigned | C tolerant | D contented |
| 23 | A found out | B came across | C ran into | D met with |
| 24 | A evaluate | B account | C estimate | D reckon |
| 25 | A appointing | B signing | C registering | D enlisting |

Part Five (10 questions)

In this task you have to find the right word to fill each gap in the text. There are ten gaps for you to fill. Items tested may include prepositions, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, conjunctions, etc.

The example below is an article about working abroad. Ten words are missing and you have to find the right word for each gap (31–40) in the text. In the exam, you have to write this word in CAPITAL LETTERS on your Answer Sheet.

WORKING ABROAD

An increasing number of people are finding it necessary to spend at least part of their working life abroad. An international career used to be something people opted into from choice, but **(31)** many it has now become a requirement of staying in work. You do not have to be working in a huge multi-national corporation to find **(32)** being asked to work abroad. Companies that not so **(33)** years ago reserved foreign travel for directors, are now sending middle managers and even new recruits on projects overseas.

The characteristics of international travel will vary widely. For some people it will mean that they will occasionally have to spend a **(34)** days in a foreign city, while for others it will mean that they will constantly be moving from **(35)** country to another until they

eventually lose touch with **(36)** original national identity.

The growing demand for people with the skills and experience to work in cross-national contexts places a premium on those who have developed the skills to enable them to rise to that challenge. **(37)** is needed is flexibility and adaptability, both of **(38)** arise from a state of mind rather than from innate ability. Teamworking skills are also important and **(39)** is the ability to communicate effectively, especially **(40)** long distances, via new communications technologies, such as videoconferencing and teleconferencing.

An international career requires a variety of skills. The time to begin preparing for such a career is now.

Part Six (12 questions)

In a work situation you may sometimes have to read a text and check that there are no mistakes before the final version is approved and can be sent out. This is called proofreading and you may have to check letters, publicity materials, etc. in this way.

In this part of the test, you have to read a text which contains twelve numbered lines. In each numbered line there may, or may not, be a mistake and you have to find it. There may be extra lines without numbers at the end, but these are not part of the test.

The text below is about writing good covering letters. In most of the lines (41–52) there is one extra word. It is either grammatically incorrect or does not fit with the meaning of the text. If the line is not correct, you have to find the extra word and in the exam you write it in CAPITAL LETTERS on your Answer Sheet. Some lines, however, are correct and in the exam you should write CORRECT on your Answer Sheet. Lines 0 and 00 are examples. Line 0 is correct and in line 00 the extra/wrong word is 'you'.

DON'T GET "FILED IN THE BIN"

0 When you're applying for a job, what can you do to ensure that your
00 covering letter doesn't just get 'filed' in the rubbish bin? Firstly, you
41 always remember that the purpose of a covering letter is there to
42 complement for your CV. This means it should flesh out and explain
43 clearly through any points that the CV alone doesn't deal with and that
44 therefore might otherwise be missed out by prospective employers.
45 For example, if you're looking to change in industries, then your letter
46 ought to explain them why you want to make the move, what your
47 motivation is, and what you hope to achieve. If your CV shows that you
48 don't hold a relevant qualification that the job ad has specified it (say,
49 a university degree or a vocational diploma), so you'll need to explain
50 why you should still be considered. It's not easy, and often writing the
51 letter can take twice as long as writing your CV. But because to some
52 extent that is how it should be: a CV is a formal, with structured document
that simply imparts information, whereas a letter is your chance to make an
impression.

■ Writing

Time: 1 hour 10 minutes

For BEC Higher, you have to produce two pieces of writing:

- a short report based on graphic input;

and one of the following (you choose):

- a longer report
- a piece of business correspondence
- a proposal.

The Writing paper is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One

In Part One you have to write a brief (120–140 word) report. The task provides a realistic situation in which you have to analyse graphic information and express it in words.

In the example below, you have a bar chart which shows the cost of buying three different photocopiers, the cost of a warranty on each machine, and their expected running costs for the first two years. Using the information from the bar chart, you have to write a short report comparing the costs for the three machines.



Part Two

In this part of the Writing paper, you have to choose from three options: a report, a letter or a proposal. The rubric tells you the reason for writing and who you are writing to.

At this level, both reports and proposals must be clearly organised and use a suitable format, including, for example, paragraphs, headings, introduction and/or conclusion. In the exam, you should write your answers in pen in your question paper booklet.

Question 2

- Your manager is keen to introduce new practices into your company. He has asked you to write a report which includes details of two practices from another company which you would suggest adopting in your own company.
- Write the **report** for your manager, including the following information:
 - what you admire about the other company
 - which two of its practices you would adopt
 - why your company would benefit from them.

Question 3

- Your company has employed an outside consultant to organise an exhibition of your products, to be held next month. His work is unsatisfactory, and your boss has now decided that you should take over full responsibility instead. Your boss has asked you to write to the consultant to explain why he has been replaced.
- Write the **letter** to the consultant:
 - giving two reasons why he has been replaced
 - telling him he will be paid for this work
 - asking him to brief you on the current situation.

Question 4

- Your company has decided to conduct an investigation into the possibility of increasing the number of ways in which technology is used throughout the organisation. You have been asked to write a proposal concerning the use of technology in your department for the Managing Director.
- Write your **proposal**, including the following:
 - a brief outline of the current uses of technology in your department
 - a description of what technological improvements could be made
 - an explanation of the benefits these changes might bring
 - recommendations for the kind of training that would be necessary.

■ Listening

Time: approx. 40 minutes including 10 minutes' transfer time.

The Listening paper is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One (12 questions)

This is a sentence-completion, gap-filling or note-taking task. You have to give only the key words (three words maximum) of the answer. The recording lasts about 2 to 3 minutes and is a monologue (or single long turns by more than one speaker). You will hear the recording twice. There are then 12 questions for you to answer.

In the example below, you hear an introduction to a seminar, called the Business Master Class, about the use of Information Technology at work. As you listen, you should complete the notes (1–12). For each answer, you can write a maximum of three words.

THE BUSINESS MASTER CLASS

SEMINAR NOTES

Arrangements for participants

1 The event will take place over

2 Seminar organised by

3 The title of the last session will be

4 To use the New City Hotel car park, delegates must obtain a

Dr Sangalli

5 Dr Sangalli has advised many

6 The name of his consultancy is

7 He is the author of

8 In Europe, he is the best-known

The Business Master Class

Two problems for companies:

9 to become more

10 to establish new

Two outcomes of session:

11 design your own

12 take away documents containing actual

Part Two (10 questions)

This is a matching task based on five short extracts linked by theme or topic and spoken by five different speakers, in monologue form. The recording lasts a total of approximately 3 to 4 minutes and you will hear it twice. There are two tasks for each of the five extracts and for each task, you have a list of eight possible options to choose from.

In the example below, on the recording there are five different business people talking about trips they have recently been on. You have to match each of the five extracts you hear on the recording to one of the purposes (A–H) and one of the problems (A–H).

TASK ONE – PURPOSE	
13	A to supervise staff training
14	B to hold job interviews
15	C to introduce new policy
16	D to visit possible new premises
17	E to observe working practices
	F to meet a new manager
	G to sign a new contract
	H to deal with a complaint

TASK TWO – PROBLEM	
18	A I forgot a document.
19	B My hotel was noisy.
20	C I was late for a meeting.
21	D I didn't understand some figures.
22	E The service at my hotel was bad.
	F I had some wrong information.
	G I didn't have an interpreter.
	H I experienced computer problems.

Part Three (8 questions)

This task may be a conversation or discussion, usually with two or more speakers. There are then eight questions or statements, and for each one you have a choice of three answers. You will hear the recording twice.

In the example below, the recording is part of a conversation between a management consultant and the Human Resources Manager of Jenkins, a company which manufactures children's clothing. For each question or statement (23–24) you have to choose A, B or C. In the exam, there are six more questions like these.

23 What is said about the ownership of Jenkins?

- A The founder has sold the company to someone else.
- B Jenkins has merged with another company.
- C There has been no change of ownership.

24 What does the Human Resources Manager see as the main external threat to Jenkins?

- A Their retailers are becoming less willing to pay their prices.
- B Consumers are buying more top-of-the-range children's clothes.
- C More and more companies are producing children's clothes.

■ Speaking

Time: 16 minutes

The Speaking test is conducted by two external examiners and you will be tested in pairs of candidates. At centres with an uneven number of candidates, the last single candidate is examined in a group of three. Speaking is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One

For this part of the test, one of the examiners will ask you questions on a number of personal or work-related subjects.

Part Two

In this part, each of you has to choose one topic from a set of three, and talk about it for 1 minute. You have 1 minute in which to prepare, and should use this time to make brief notes. While you speak, the other candidate listens, and then asks a question at the end of the talk. You may make notes while listening to your partner. Each of you is given a different set of three tasks from which to choose. Some typical task prompts are given below.

It is wise to structure the 1-minute talk with a short introduction and conclusion. You should also make the structure clear when giving the talk in order to show that you have made a proper plan. Imagine you are giving a presentation to colleagues.

Examples of topic areas include: advertising, career planning, communications, customer relations, finance, health and safety, management (personnel, production, transport, etc.), marketing, recruitment, sales, technology, training and travel.

A: Time Management: the importance of punctuality in all aspects of work

B: Recruitment: how to ensure that job advertisements attract appropriate applicants

C: Customer Relations: how to set up an effective customer services system

Part Three

For Part Three you have to work together with your partner using a prompt which is given to both of you. The prompt consists of several sentences presenting a business-related situation followed by two discussion points. You will have enough time to read the prompt and then discuss the situation together.

You should treat the task as a simulation and imagine that you are in a work environment with a real situation to discuss, on which you should try to reach decisions. The opinions you express are your own.

Staff Relocation

Your company needs to relocate several members of staff to a new branch opening in another part of the country. You have been asked to submit ideas on how to make relocation attractive for staff.

Discuss, and decide together:

- which types of financial incentives the company could offer to staff
- what information staff would need to know about the new location

Next steps

We wish you every success in taking BEC Higher and we hope that you will take other Cambridge ESOL exams in future. BEC Higher is the top level of the BEC suite of business-oriented exams but if you are interested in taking a general English qualification, you could consider the highest-level exam offered by Cambridge ESOL, Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) as your next step. You can find out more information about CPE on our website at: www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/cpe.htm

What people have said about BEC

BEC has helped develop cross-cultural communication skills and overall development of the students. It has had an impact on confidence levels through international certification.

Laura Cirello, Head of Learning and Development, JP Morgan Treasury and Security Services

It is essential to have self-confidence and the confirmation that you can keep up in today's global business world. The Cambridge BEC Higher certificate bestows this self-confidence because it makes effective communication possible on the one hand and on the other increases the market value of the person who passes it.

Keith Rossborough, AKAD Language + Culture, Zürich, Switzerland

In order for our students to pick up a successful professional career we felt that they must hone their skill in communication and the Cambridge BEC programme seemed to us to offer an excellent opportunity for our students.

Dr Ashoke R Thakur, Vice Chancellor, West Bengal University of Technology, Kolkata

Companies who recognise Cambridge ESOL exams

3M	Deutsche Bank	Nestlé
Adidas	DHL	Nokia
Agfa-Gevaert	Disney	PepsiCo
AstraZeneca	DuPont	Philips
AT&T	Ericsson	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
Barclays Bank	Estée Lauder	Procter & Gamble
BASF	General Motors	Rank Xerox
Bayer	Gillette	Roche
BP	GlaxoSmithKline	Rolls-Royce
British Airways	Goodyear	Shell
Cable & Wireless	Hertz	Siemens
Carrefour	Hewlett-Packard	Sony
Citibank	HSBC	Sun Microsystems
Coca-Cola	IBM	Texaco
Colgate-Palmolive	Johnson & Johnson	Toyota
Credit Suisse	KPMG	Unilever
DaimlerChrysler	Microsoft	Vodafone
Dell	Mobil Oil	World Bank

Recognition of BEC is increasing rapidly as a growing number of companies are using the examination as a focus for in-company training courses. You can find a list of companies that use the BEC examinations for a variety of purposes including recruitment at:

www.CambridgeESOL.org/recognition/search.php

www.CambridgeESOL.org/BEC

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