



Cambridge Assessment
English

Cambridge

English Qualifications

A2 Key

Information for candidates
for exams from 2020

A2 Key

How to use this guide

You can print this document if you wish, but it is better to read it on screen. Click the links in the document to access other useful online resources such as videos and practice tests, and to find the information you need.

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About the exam

What is A2 Key?

A2 Key is an English language exam at Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). There isn't a specific age for taking A2 Key but the content of the exam suits older teens and those who have left school.

You can take A2 Key as a paper-based exam or a computer-based exam.

What's in the exam?

Here's a summary of what's in the exam.

Paper details	What's in the paper?	What do you need to do?
 Reading and Writing 60 minutes	The Reading and Writing paper has seven parts. The tasks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• answering multiple-choice questions on short and longer texts, including messages, signs, articles and websites• completing gap-fill tasks (with and without multiple-choice options)• writing a message using information you're given• writing a story from three pictures.	You need to be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand real-world messages• read and choose the correct word• read and choose the correct answer• choose the correct words to complete a text• write a message, e.g. a note or email• write a short story.
 Listening 30 minutes	The Listening paper has five parts. The tasks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• filling in missing words on a form while listening to one or two people speaking• answering multiple-choice questions while listening to short and longer texts• matching a list of nouns to people while listening.	You need to be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• listen for important information in short and long conversations and monologues• listen and write down important information and spell words correctly• listen for the main idea or message in short monologues or conversations.
 Speaking About 8 minutes	The Speaking test has two parts. In the first part, the interlocutor asks the candidate 'getting to know you' type questions. In the second part, candidates talk to each other about pictures on a specific topic.	You need to be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• answer questions about yourself• discuss a topic with your partner, using pictures to help you• talk about likes and dislikes, giving reasons.

You don't need to pass all of the papers to pass the whole exam. For example, if you do very well in the Reading and Writing paper and the Speaking paper, but you don't do so well in the Listening paper, it is still possible to pass. The Reading and Writing paper tests two skills, so this paper has double the weight of the Listening and the Speaking papers.

Preparing for the exam

There are four things you need to do to prepare for the exam:

1. Practise your English in all four of the language skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking.
2. Improve your grammar and vocabulary.
3. Make sure you know what to expect in the exam.
4. Make sure you know the practical arrangements for the exam.

The most important of these is to practise communicating clearly. For example, in the Speaking test, the examiner will be interested in how you ask your partner questions, and how you answer their questions.

To help you prepare for A2 Key, our [website](#) has a lot of free exam preparation material, including:

- sample papers and a computer-based practice test
- skills practice activities
- language practice activities.

To help you prepare for the exam, Cambridge Assessment English and Cambridge University Press have developed a wide range of **official preparation materials** including coursebooks and practice tests. You can purchase these in both print and digital formats.

Learn more about the exam



sample paper



computer-based
practice test



video of
Speaking test



examiner's
comments on speaking
performances

Studying for the exam

How can I improve my reading?

The Reading paper contains different kinds of texts, so try to look at texts that you can find around you or on the internet, not just in your coursebook. Some things that would be helpful to look at include:

- signs, notices and packaging information
- short newspaper and magazine articles
- notes, text messages and emails from friends or colleagues
- brochures and leaflets (you may be able to find leaflets in English in a library or in a tourist information office)
- websites
- **graded readers**, both fiction and non-fiction (books that are written for people learning English).

The Reading paper tests how well you can read in different ways, so you need to practise these skills.

- Try to read a text quickly to get the main idea. (This is called 'skimming'.)
- Read a text to find out certain information. For example, read a cinema website to find when a film is on. (This is called 'scanning'.)
- Read some texts carefully, so that you understand as much as possible.

You will need to read in all of these different ways in the Reading test. Another useful thing to do is to try to guess the meaning of words that you don't know.



How can I improve my writing?

Here are some ideas for preparing for the Writing tasks.

- Write short messages or emails to friends, family or colleagues, and encourage them to write back to you.
- Learn how to do things in your writing like giving information, inviting, suggesting, thanking and apologising.
- Practise writing messages that are at least 25 words (Part 6 of the test), so that you know what this number of words looks like.
- Find pictures in a coursebook or online which make a story (Part 7 of the test). Tell the story first, then write it. Write at least 35 words, so that you know what this number of words looks like.
- Look at model answers in coursebooks to see what good answers at A2 level are like.
- Practise writing with the same time limit as in the exam.
- Make sure you write about all three questions in the message (Part 6 of the test) and all three pictures (Part 7 of the test). Also make sure your writing is in a logical order and that your sentences are connected to each other. The examiners look at these when marking your writing.
- Always check your writing for spelling, grammar and vocabulary mistakes. The examiner will look at these when they mark your writing, as well as how clear your message is. You can use our online tool **Write & Improve** to help you.

How can I improve my listening?

Try listening to people speaking as much as you can, even if you can't understand everything. You can find many different things to listen to online. You may find it easier to watch videos so that you can see the person speaking while you're listening. You could listen to:

- videos on the **Cambridge English TV YouTube channel**
- listening activities in the **Learning English** section of the Cambridge English website
- Sample chapters from **Cambridge University Press** graded readers
- listening activities on language learning websites such as the **BBC** or the **British Council**.

Practise the letters of the alphabet and long numbers, such as telephone numbers and dates.

Listen to people speaking in different accents (American, Australian, British, Irish), as you may hear different accents in the test. You can use the internet to find podcasts or radio or TV programmes from different countries around the world.

What is the best way to improve my speaking?

The best way to improve your speaking is to speak as much English as you can with your friends, family, colleagues and your teacher. Try to talk about different things. Practise asking questions to find out what other people think.

You could look at a picture with a friend and ask each other questions about it. You can also practise talking about a picture by yourself. If you record yourself, you can listen back and find ways to improve your language, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Watch an example of a **Speaking test**, so you know what to expect on the day. If you read the **examiner's comments**, you will understand what the examiners are looking for in your Speaking test.

How can I learn to use more vocabulary and grammar?

These ideas will help you to improve your grammar and to use more interesting vocabulary.

- Tip for learning new words: Write it! Use it! Remember it! Keep a vocabulary book.
- Write down new words in your vocabulary book that you see in your coursebook or in past exam papers. Try to write words that go together and write an example sentence so that you can learn them, e.g. *plan to do something – I plan to go to the cinema on Saturday.*
- Make sure you know vocabulary about many different topics. Ask your teacher about the topics that can be in the exam. You could also look at the **A2 Key wordlist**.
- Learn the different forms of irregular verbs (e.g. *I go, I went, I have gone*).
- Learn which prepositions go with different words (e.g. *to borrow something from someone, to be kind to someone*).
- Practise your spelling. If you have problems with spelling a word, practise writing it again and again until you can remember the correct spelling.
- Try grammar and vocabulary activities at A2 level. You can find these in the **Learning English** section.

Knowing what to expect in the exam

It's also really important that you know what to expect in the exam. That way, you'll be more confident and relaxed on exam day.

What do I have to do in each part of the exam?

You can download sample papers and find more information about each part of the exam on our [website](#). You can find paper-based sample papers and computer-based sample papers. You can also buy a book of authentic practice tests [online](#) or from bookshops.

Looking at sample papers means that you will know what you'll have to do in each part of the exam.

How important are practice tests?

It is very useful to do some practice tests, so you'll know exactly what is in the exam. You should also practise filling in the answer sheets, so that you know how to do this on exam day.

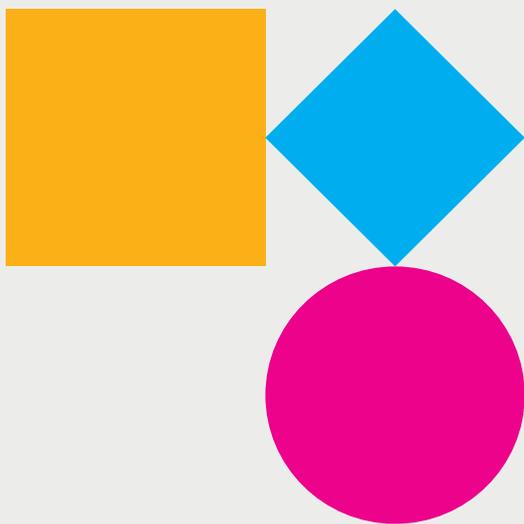
It's also important to do a timed exam. This will show you how much time you have for each part.

When you've finished the practice test, look at the answers and think carefully about the ones that are wrong, and reasons why.

After you've done the writing part, compare your answers to the sample answers.

When you practise doing a Speaking test, try this with a friend.

Remember, doing practice tests is only part of the work you need to do to get ready for the exam. Think about what you are good at and not so good at when you use English. Try to improve your English, not just for the exam but for life after the exam!



Practical arrangements for the exam

When and where will my exam be?

Ask your teacher. If your school does not register students for the exam, you can find an exam centre near you on our [website](#).

Make sure you arrive for the exam in good time. Check where the exam is and how long it will take you to travel there. The centre will ask you to arrive before the start time of the exam, so they can perform ID/security checks and explain what you should do.

How do I register for results online?

When you register for the exam, you will receive a Confirmation of Entry. This will show the link to the [Online Results Service](#), as well as your Candidate ID number and Secret Number, which you will need to use to register to receive your results online.

You should register for the results service before you take the exam so that you get your results more quickly.

What do I need to take with me on exam day?

You need to take your identification, e.g. your passport or other photographic ID. It must be the original and it must be valid on the day of the exam. This is so that the centre can check who you are.

You should take pens and pencils. Your centre will also give you extra pens or pencils if you need them.

You can take a clear bottle of water, but don't bring any other food or drink.

So that the exam is fair to everyone, you cannot take your bag, your mobile phone or other electronic items in the exam room. Check with your centre if it's better to leave anything valuable at home.

Who do I ask if I have any questions before the exam?

You can ask your teacher questions about the exam. If you've registered for the exam yourself (not through a school), you can contact your local centre with any questions. You can [find your nearest centre](#) on our website.

Exam day

When you arrive:

- Make sure you are well prepared for exam day. Get a good night's sleep and arrive at the centre on time.
- When you arrive at the centre, you may be asked to fill in a sheet of candidate data. Don't worry – this is just information for us at Cambridge Assessment English.
- Get your photo ID ready for checking. The centre may also take your photo for identification.
- The centre will show you where to put your bags, phones, etc.
- There will be a clock in the exam room, and a timer on your screen for computer-based exams.

In the exam room:

- Listen carefully to the instructions which the invigilator will give you. Make sure you follow all the instructions.
- If you have any questions, need help or want to leave the room, raise your hand to ask for help. Do not talk to other people, or try to see what other candidates are writing.
- For computer-based exams, follow the instructions on your computer screen carefully.

At the end of the exam:

- For paper-based exams, stop writing as soon as the invigilator tells you to.
- Give all papers to the invigilator, including any notes you make.
- Stay in your seat until the invigilator tells you to leave the room.



Here are some tips for what to do in each part of the exam.



Reading

- Look carefully at the instructions and examples for each part. They will show you what to do.
- Look at the titles of the longer texts. The titles tell you what the text is about and where it comes from. This will help you to understand the text.
- Read the texts and the questions carefully, and make sure that you answer the questions. Don't just choose an answer because you see one word.
- If you don't know the meaning of a word, don't worry. Try to guess what it means.
- Answer all the questions, even if you're not sure. Always choose an answer for each multiple-choice question.
- Take your time and don't hurry. There is plenty of time to answer all of the questions.

For paper-based exams:

- Use a pencil to complete the answer sheet (not a pen).
- Check that you have marked your answers in the correct place on the answer sheet.
- If you make a mistake, use an eraser to rub it out.

For computer-based exams:

- There are no examples in the Reading test. You will watch a short tutorial before the test begins.

Writing



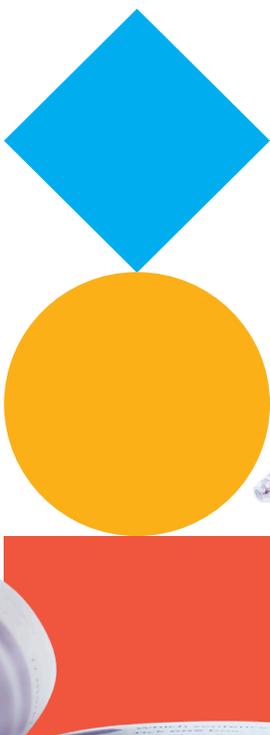
- Check your spelling.
- Give yourself time to write, check and edit your work. If you do change anything, make sure that your writing is easy to read.
- Write at least the minimum number of words – 25 words in Part 6 and 35 words in Part 7.

For paper-based exams:

- Make sure you write your answer on the correct part of the answer sheet. Use a pencil, not a pen.

For computer-based exams:

- You can make notes on paper during the exam and leave these notes on your desk at the end of the exam.



Listening



- Check that you can hear the test properly. If you can't hear the recording, raise your hand immediately.
- You will hear each recording twice.
- Your centre will tell you whether you can use headphones for the Listening paper.
- Use any pauses to read the instructions and the questions. Read the instructions carefully.
- Try to answer the questions the first time you listen, then use the second listening to check your answers and to fill in any answers that you didn't hear the first time.
- Answer all the questions, even if you're not sure. Always choose an answer for each multiple-choice question.
- Don't worry if you make a spelling mistake, unless the word is very common e.g. *Monday*, or if the spelling of the word is dictated in the recording.

For paper-based exams:

- At the end of the test, copy your answers carefully onto the answer sheet in pencil and check your work. Use an eraser if you make a mistake. You will have 6 minutes to do this.

For computer-based exams:

- You can make notes on paper during the exam and leave these notes on your desk at the end of the exam.

Speaking



- You will do the Speaking test with a partner, and there will be two examiners. One is the interlocutor, who will ask you questions and give you a global mark. The other is the assessor, who will just listen and give you marks by using the assessment criteria.
- If there is an odd number of candidates, the last group may be a group of three (not two). In this case, the test will last for 13–15 minutes instead of 8–10 minutes for two candidates.
- Listen to what the interlocutor says and to what your partner says.
- Speak to the interlocutor in Part 1, and to your partner and the interlocutor in Part 2.
- Listen carefully to your partner and respond to what they say. Be prepared to ask them questions to start the discussion.
- Don't worry if you think your partner is better at speaking English than you, or is not as good as you, or has a different personality. The examiners mark you individually.
- Try to answer the interlocutor's questions with more than just one word.
- Always make the best use of the time you have to show your language skills, but don't interrupt your partner. It's important to let them finish.
- Speak clearly, so that both examiners can hear you.
- Ask the interlocutor to repeat the instructions, or a question, if you have not understood. This does not make a difference to your score.
- Always try to answer the questions. The examiners can't mark you if you don't say anything.
- Don't worry if you think you've made a mistake. The important thing is that you communicate with your partner and with the interlocutor.
- Don't worry if the examiner stops you. It is important that the tests are not too long.
- Try to relax and enjoy the test. Remember that the examiners want you to do your best.

Working with a partner in the Speaking test

Your partner may be a student from your school, or they may be from another school. Check with your centre to find out more.

The examiners are trained to give all candidates equal opportunities to do their best.

Examiners are trained to deal with two candidates who have very different personalities (for example, one is very shy and the other is very outgoing). Everyone has the chance to show what they can do.



After the exam

Results and next steps

How long do I have to wait for my results and my certificate?

Your Statement of Results is usually available four to six weeks after the exam for paper-based exams, and two to three weeks after the exam for computer-based exams. The fastest way to get your results is to sign up to our free [Online Results Service](#). You can see your results online by entering your Candidate ID and Secret Number. These are on your Confirmation of Entry.

Your certificate will be sent about three weeks after the results are available.

What information will be on my Statement of Results?

On your Statement of Results, you'll see:

- your score on the Cambridge English Scale for each of the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)
- your score on the Cambridge English Scale for the overall exam
- your grade for the overall exam (A, B, C or Level A1)
- your CEFR level for the overall exam.

You can [find more information](#) on understanding your Statement of Results.

To help you understand what your results mean, [watch our video](#).



What does my overall score say about my level?

Your overall score for the exam is given on the Cambridge English Scale and shows how well you did in the exam. If you achieve a score of between 140 and 150 (A), this means you performed exceptionally well and that your English is above A2 level, the level of A2 Key. Your certificate will state that you showed ability at Level B1.

If you achieve a score between 120 and 139 (B or C) in the exam, you will receive the A2 Key certificate at Level A2.

If your performance is below A2 level, but within A1 level, you will get a Cambridge English certificate stating that you showed ability at Level A1.

What is the online Results Verification Service?

If you want to use your result to apply for a place at university or college or for a job, you can use the Results Verification Service. This service lets universities, colleges or employers check your exam result. You will need to give them your Candidate ID number and Secret Number.

What can I do with my A2 Key qualification?

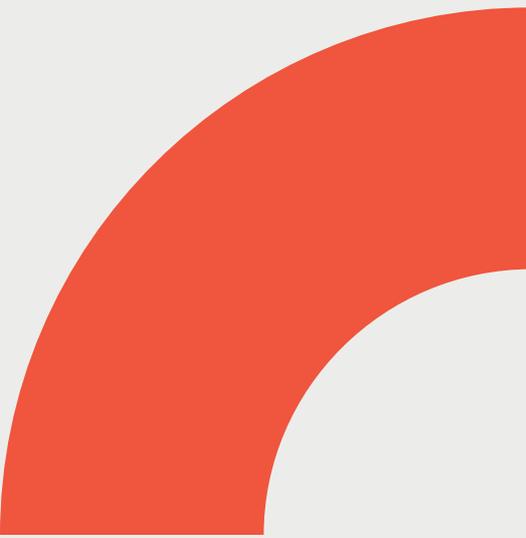
Your A2 Key certificate is accepted by thousands of leading businesses and educational institutions around the world. [Find out more](#) about who accepts Cambridge English Qualifications.

How can I continue my language learning after passing A2 Key?

After you've passed A2 Key, you can go on to take B1 Preliminary, and following that you could also take B2 First and C1 Advanced. [Find out more](#) about all our Cambridge English Qualifications.

A few facts and figures about us:

- 5.5 million assessments taken every year
- Accepted by over 25,000 organisations worldwide
- 2,800 exam centres in 130 countries
- Over 50,000 preparation centres
- Providing English language assessment since 1913



We help people learn English and prove their skills to the world

We are Cambridge Assessment English. Part of the University of Cambridge, we help millions of people learn English and prove their skills to the world.

For us, learning English is more than just exams and grades. It's about having the confidence to communicate and access a lifetime of enriching experiences and opportunities.

With the right support, learning a language is an exhilarating journey. We're with you every step of the way.

Cambridge Assessment English
The Triangle Building
Shaftesbury Road
Cambridge
CB2 8EA
United Kingdom

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