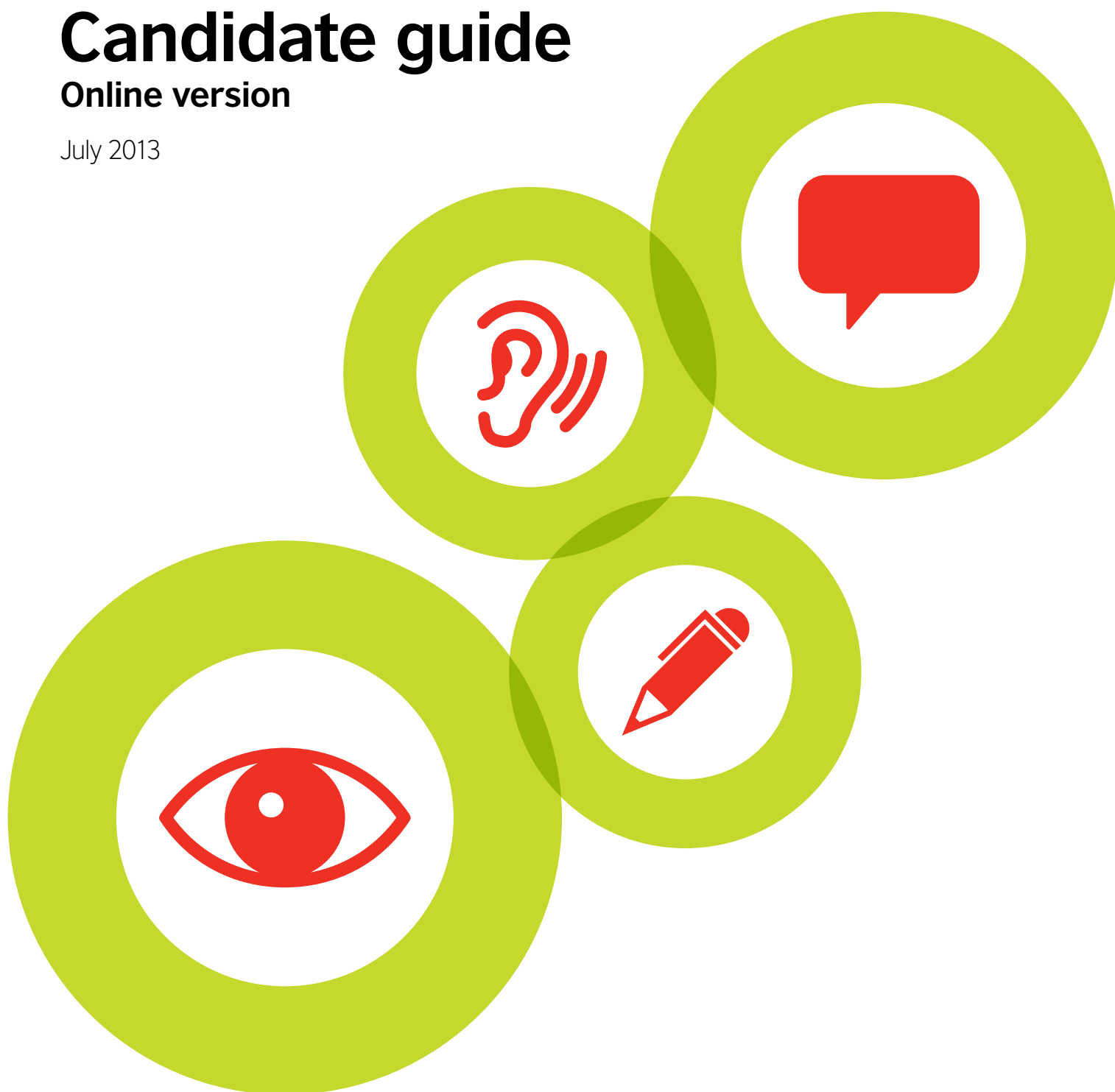


Candidate guide

Online version

July 2013



The purpose of this guide is to help Aptis candidates prepare for the test. There is more information about the test, as well as demonstration versions (demo tests) available on the Aptis website (www.britishcouncil.org/exams/aptis).

This guide first gives a brief overview of the test, then looks at each of the tests in turn and offers advice on how best to approach the items. It then gives a description of how the test is scored.

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The British Council

The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide.

We are on the ground in six continents and over 100 countries bringing international opportunity to life, every day. Each year we work with millions of people, connecting them with the United Kingdom, sharing our cultures and the UK's most attractive assets: English, the arts, education and our ways of living and organising society. We have over 75 years' experience of doing this.

In line with our Royal Charter, we aim to bring high quality English materials to every learner or teacher who wants them around the world. We work with governments to transform whole education systems to increase opportunity and employability through English. We train teachers by radio, web and broadcast in developing and post conflict countries. We also deliver English teaching and offer a wide range of exams, from English tests to school and business qualifications, in more than 90 countries worldwide.

Go to www.britishcouncil.org for more information about the British Council.

Introducing the Aptis test

Aptis is a new and innovative global English assessment tool from the British Council. It is an English test for adults and young adults, which can be used to assess ability in all four English skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. It also allows organisations and individuals to develop specific English skills, with the ability to test just one skill, e.g. listening only (combined with the core grammar and vocabulary component).

Aptis is usually taken on a computer, but the core test, the reading test and the writing test can all be taken using the more traditional pen and paper test.

From late 2013, it will be possible in many parts of the world to take the speaking test and the listening test using a phone, while the new iPad and tablet versions will also appear in late 2013.

Level

Aptis does not test at a single level. Instead, it includes a range of questions, which are designed to allow the candidate to demonstrate his or her best ability. The test results are reported either on a numerical scale (0–50) or reported as a Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) level.

Recognition

Aptis is not a recognised test. It cannot be used for visa, university entrance or other immigration purposes. The test is designed to be used within institutions or companies, so the results are only of value to you within the client institution or company.

Aptis test structure

Aptis consists of five components, core (grammar and vocabulary), reading, listening, writing and speaking. Clients decide which components are needed for their situation, so you, the candidate, may be preparing to take a single component package (e.g. core + reading), a two-component package (e.g. core + reading + listening), a three-component package (e.g. core + reading + listening + writing) or a four-component package (core + reading + listening + writing + speaking). In fact, there are 15 possible combinations:

| | |
|--------|--|
| Core + | Reading |
| Core + | Listening |
| Core + | Writing |
| Core + | Speaking |
| Core + | Reading + Listening |
| Core + | Reading + Writing |
| Core + | Reading + Speaking |
| Core + | Listening + Writing |
| Core + | Listening + Speaking |
| Core + | Writing + Speaking |
| Core + | Reading + Listening + Writing |
| Core + | Reading + Listening + Speaking |
| Core + | Reading + Writing + Speaking |
| Core + | Listening + Writing + Speaking |
| Core + | Reading + Listening + Writing + Speaking |

Quick guide to the Aptis tests

| Test | Test design | Format | Activity |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Core 25 minutes | Part 1 Grammar Complete a short dialogue | Complete a sentence or phrase. | Three-option multiple choice. |
| | Part 2 Vocabulary | Word usage. Word matching (similar meaning). Word pairs or word combinations (words commonly used together). | Match words. Sets of five target words with ten options. |
| Reading 30 minutes | Part 1 Sentence comprehension | Choose words to complete sentences. | Five three-option multiple-choice questions focusing on grammar, vocabulary and sentence-level understanding. |
| | Part 2 Text cohesion | Put sentences into the correct order. | Re-order a series of sentences to form a story. |
| | Part 3 Short text comprehension | Text completion using appropriate words, focusing on text-level understanding. | Select words from a list to form a short text. |
| | Part 4 Long text comprehension | A long text with a series of headings to be matched to each paragraph (with distractors). | Matching, focusing on global text-level understanding and integrating heading to main text. |
| Listening 25–50 minutes | Part 1 Word and number recognition | Listen to a short input (in the form of a phone message) to identify specific information. | Four-option multiple choice for each item (may be listened to twice). The minimum time (listening once) is 25 minutes. |
| | Part 2 Literal meaning | Listen to short conversations with two speakers or to monologues to identify specific information. | |
| | Part 3 Inference meaning | Listen to short conversations with two speakers or to monologues to identify speaker attitude, intention, mood, etc. | |
| Writing 50 minutes | Part 1 Word-level writing | Complete basic personal information on a form. | Form completion. |
| | Part 2 Short text writing | Personal information questions. | 20–30 words. |
| | Part 3 Three written responses to written input | Respond to written input on a social network-type website. | 40 words for each question. |
| | Part 4 Formal and informal text writing | Write an informal email to a friend and a more formal email. Both emails are in reaction to information about a change. | 50 words for part 1. 120–150 words for part 2. |
| Speaking 12 minutes | Part 1 Personal information | Respond to three personal information questions. | 30 seconds for each response. |
| | Part 2 Description of picture and comparison with own situation | Describe a picture and answer two related questions. | 45 seconds for each response. |
| | Part 3 Describe, compare and speculate | Two contrasting pictures presented. Answer three questions of increasing difficulty. | 45 seconds for each response. |
| | Part 4 Discuss personal experience or opinion in relation to an abstract topic | Picture prompt, though picture is not central to answering the task. Answer three questions related to a single topic. | One minute preparation time, two minutes response time. |

Aptis core test


The core test consists of two parts. The first assesses your knowledge of English grammar. The second part assesses your knowledge of English vocabulary.

To know what parts of grammar to expect in the test, see the British Council/EAQUALS core inventory. This is free, and is available online at:

http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/eaquals2011/documents/EAQUALS_British_Council_Core_Curriculum_April2011.pdf

As with the other tests, it is really helpful to practise before taking Aptis by taking the full practice test, available on the Aptis website at:

www.britishcouncil.org/exams/aptis

| Test design | Description | Preparation |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Part 1 Grammar | <p>In this part of the test, you will be presented with 25 questions, each focusing on a specific aspect of English grammar. The actual aspects of grammar tested are to be found in the core inventory (see above).</p> <p>While most of the questions test formal written English, a small number will focus on aspects of spoken English, for example, knowing the appropriate grammatical form to use in a particular situation (formal or informal for example).</p> <p>All 25 questions are in the format of a three-option multiple-choice. You can see some typical examples below.</p> | <p>There are a number of ways to prepare for this test. One great way to prepare for the grammar test is to use the British Council's LearnEnglish Grammar App.</p>  <p>Visit the British Council's LearnEnglish website for lots of very useful activities and tips (and more Apps): http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en</p> |
| Part 2 Vocabulary | <p>The vocabulary part of the core test also contains 25 questions. These are presented in sets of five target words (the words we are testing) with ten options from which to choose.</p> <p>There are a number of question types:</p> <p>Word definition: match a definition to a word.</p> <p>Word usage: complete a sentence by selecting the correct word.</p> <p>Word matching: find a word with a meaning similar to the target word.</p> <p>Word pairs or word combinations: these are usually the most difficult questions, as you need to know what word (from a list) is most commonly found with the target word (e.g. birthday card is common but blue card is not).</p> | <p>To prepare for this part of the test the LearnEnglish website has almost 20 different games, activities and Apps for vocabulary.</p> <p>There are also many useful websites, for example English Club has some very useful information and activities. The address is: www.englishclub.com</p> <p>Another useful tip is to take note of interesting words or word combinations when you read English texts.</p> |

Sample grammar questions

There are two basic question types. The first focuses on formal written English, and the second focuses on the use of English grammar when speaking.

Here are some examples:

1. Written grammar

He _____ me that the machine was broken.

- ☐ told
- ☐ spoke
- ☐ said

My boss says that I _____ to finish the report by Friday.

- ☐ must
- ☐ have
- ☐ should

My new computer works _____ faster than my old one.

- ☐ many
- ☐ more
- ☐ much

I have worked for this company _____ I left university.

- ☐ since
- ☐ after
- ☐ from

2. Spoken grammar

John: She's French, isn't she?

Ahmed: No, _____ she's from Belgium.

- ☐ exactly
- ☐ actually
- ☐ anyway

Zeynep: I really don't feel like going to see that movie tonight.

Peter: Ok. _____ we can go next week instead.

- ☐ maybe
- ☐ however
- ☐ nevertheless

Sample vocabulary questions

There are a number of question types. The first focuses on the definition of a word (showing that you know what the word means).

In this format, move the cursor to the definition you wish to match. Then select the correct answer and move on to the next definition.

Complete each definition using a word from the drop down list.

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| To encourage someone is to | <input type="text"/> | <div>urge gather urge refuse detach rehearse blame convert mend</div> |
| To change something is to | <input type="text"/> | |
| To prepare for something is to | <input type="text"/> | |
| To repair something is to | <input type="text"/> | |

The next question type tests your ability to identify words with a similar meaning from a list of options.

Select a word from the list that has the most similar meaning to the word on the left.

Example: big = large

| | | |
|--------------|----------------------|---|
| bare = | <input type="text"/> | <div>not real solid plain rough painful tight not clear proud</div> |
| obscure = | <input type="text"/> | |
| sore = | <input type="text"/> | |
| artificial = | <input type="text"/> | |

The final question type asks you to identify a word from a list that is commonly used with the given word.

Select a word from the list that is most often used with the word on the left.

Example: big + house

bare +

obscure +

sore +

artificial +

bare +

obscure +

sore +

artificial +

hour
light
fact
machine
circle
throat
wall
diet

There is a final question type that asks you to complete a sentence using a word from a list.

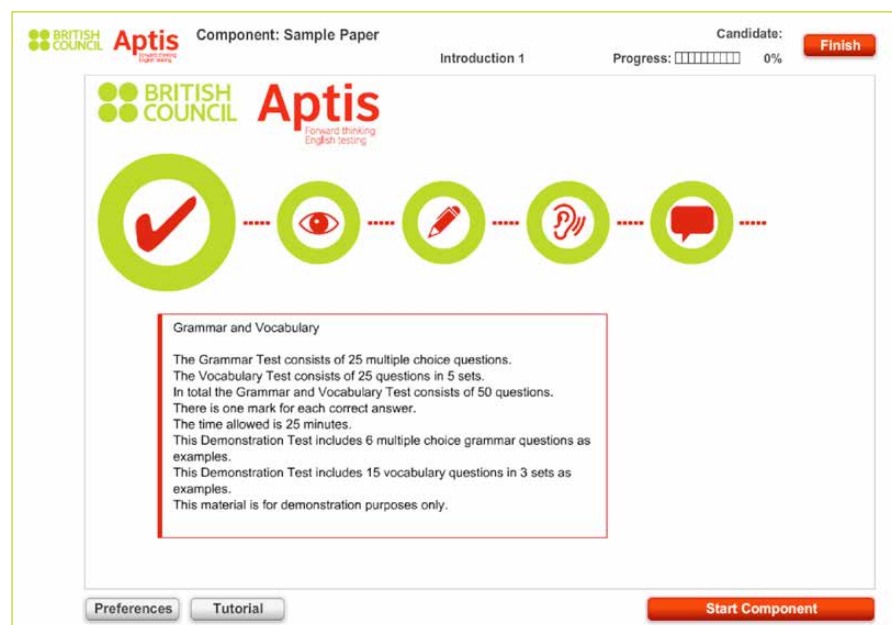
Sample questions answer keys

| Grammar sample questions answer key | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Correct answers | told have much since |
| Correct answers | actually maybe |

| Vocabulary sample questions answer key | |
|--|---|
| Correct answers | urge convert rehearse mend |
| Correct answers | plain not clear painful not real |
| Correct answers | wall fact throat light |

Getting to grips with the online test

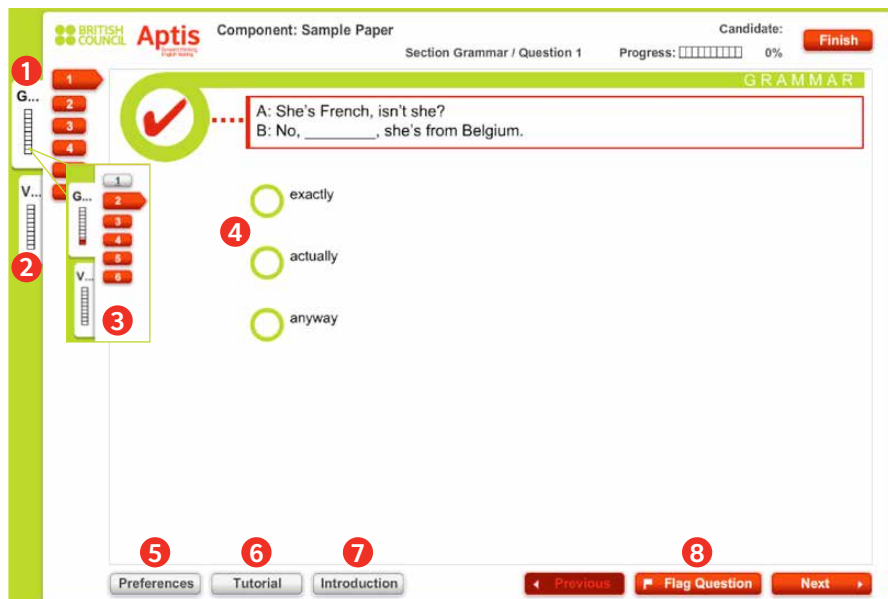
When you start the test, the introductory screen looks like this:



On screen, the questions will appear like this:



The different parts of the page are explained below:



1. Tab to see the Grammar part.
2. Tab to see the Vocabulary part.
3. When you answer a question it turns grey and the progress indicator begins to turn red.
4. Click one of these to answer.
5. To change to colours of the screen.
6. To access the online tutorial at any time.
7. To return to the introduction page at any time.
8. If you don't know the answer immediately, click here to flag the question.
This is a reminder to return to the question later.

The best approach to preparing for the test is to practise using the full practice test available on the Aptis website, which will provide you with a percentage score at the end of each component to give you an idea of how you are performing.

Aptis reading test

The test is designed to assess your reading ability. The tasks become more difficult as the test progresses.

| Test design | Description | Preparation |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Part 1 Sentence comprehension | <p>Choose drop-down words to complete sentences.</p> <p>Each sentence in the short text is free-standing but appears to form a text, so it is not necessary to understand all of the sentences to answer the individual questions.</p> <p>There are five multiple choice questions in total, each with three options.</p> | <p>This part of the reading test is aimed at CEFR level A1 (the lowest) and assesses your ability to read a sentence and to complete it with an appropriate grammatical form or word.</p> <p>To prepare for this task, it would be useful to go back to the grammar and vocabulary activities mentioned in the description of the core test above.</p> <p>Of course the best way to become a better reader is to practise. A number of publishers produce graded readers that might be of use. For example, try:</p> <p>Cambridge Bookworms Starter/Stage 1.</p> <p>Cambridge Readers – Level 1.</p> <p>Penguin Readers – Level 1.</p> <p>Macmillan Readers – Starter/Beginner.</p> <p>Headway Skills series.</p> |
| Part 2 Text cohesion | <p>In this task you will see a series of seven sentences. They belong to a single story that has been jumbled up. There is only one way that the sentences go together to form the story and your task is to click on the sentences and drag them to the correct position in the story.</p> <p>This task tests your knowledge of the cohesion of a text. So, you are looking for the clues in each sentence that show how it links to other sentences.</p> | <p>Read all of the sentences carefully first. Then, decide on the order (the first sentence is identified for you).</p> <p>Appropriate readers for this level are:</p> <p>Cambridge Bookworms Stage 1 and 2.</p> <p>Cambridge Readers – Level 2.</p> <p>Penguin Readers – Level 3.</p> <p>Macmillan Readers – Elementary.</p> |
| Part 3 Short-text comprehension | <p>In this task you will need to read a short text (about 150 words). The task is to complete the text by selecting the appropriate words (from a list) to fill in the gaps. To complete all of the text you need to understand more than just a sentence.</p> | <p>Read over the whole text before attempting the questions.</p> <p>Appropriate readers for this level are:</p> <p>Cambridge Bookworms Stage 2 and 3.</p> <p>Cambridge Readers – Level 3, 4 and 5.</p> <p>Penguin Readers – Level 4.</p> <p>Macmillan Readers – Pre Intermediate.</p> |
| Part 4 Long-text comprehension | <p>This task consists of a long text (about 750 words) with a series of headings. The task is to match the headings to paragraphs in the text (there are seven to be done). There is always an extra heading that does not fit with any paragraph.</p> <p>This task is designed to test your ability to read and understand a long text. In addition, you need to be able to demonstrate an understanding of how the headings reflect the paragraphs in different ways (sometimes using similar words, sometimes similar ideas, or by sharing a topic – though this is never obvious).</p> | <p>Read the main text carefully but as quickly as you can. Then carefully read the headings. Do all this before starting the task. Look for clues to connect the headings to the paragraphs; these might be similar words, ideas or topics.</p> <p>Appropriate readers for this level are:</p> <p>Cambridge Bookworms Stage 4, 5 and 6.</p> <p>Cambridge Readers – Level 4, 5 and 6.</p> <p>Penguin Readers – Level 5 and 6.</p> <p>Macmillan Readers – Intermediate and Upper Intermediate.</p> |

Sample reading questions

Part 1

In this task, you must select the appropriate word from a drop-down list. You should complete this task in about three minutes.

Choose one word from the list for each gap. The first one is done for you.

Dear Morgan,

Thank you for a wonderful weekend. I had a really time with you and

Becky. Your wife is a good cook and she a very nice dinner.

I am writing this note in my hotel room and I can the park from my

window. My plane leaves tomorrow and I will take a taxi to the airport .

breakfast. I hope you and Becky will come and with me in Rome next

summer. I am feeling a little tired now and I to have a sleep.

Thanks again and see you soon,

James

Part 2

In the second task, the objective is to sort the sentences into the correct order to make a story. Do this by clicking on a sentence and dragging it to its correct position. In the example below, we are moving the sentence at point 6 up to point 2. When we do this the sentence at point 2 swaps position.

Order the sentences below to make a story. The first one (1) is done for you.

1 **Alfred Hitchcock was born in London in 1899.**

2 He was soon one of Hollywood's top directors and in 1956 he became an American citizen.

3 At the end of his long career he returned to Britain to make a film in London.

4 After directing several more popular films, he sailed to America.

5 At the start of his career he made silent films in England and Germany.

6 He got his first job in a film studio when he was a young man.

7 He made a big impact when he directed *Blackmail*, which was Britain's first sound film and a big success.

1 **Alfred Hitchcock was born in London in 1899.**

2 He got his first job in a film studio when he was a young man.

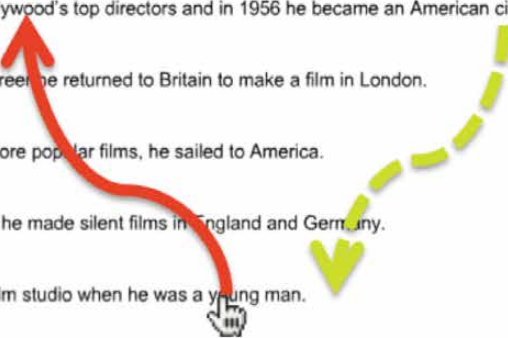
3 At the end of his long career he returned to Britain to make a film in London.

4 After directing several more popular films, he sailed to America.

5 At the start of his career he made silent films in England and Germany.

6 He was soon one of Hollywood's top directors and in 1956 he became an American citizen.

7 He made a big impact when he directed *Blackmail*, which was Britain's first sound film and a big success.



Part 3

In the third task, you must select the word from the group at the bottom of the screen (in the green boxes) and drag the appropriate word into each of the seven empty boxes in the text. As you can see, there are 10 word options and only seven spaces.

If you change your mind, that's not a problem as you can move a word out of a box if necessary.

Read the text and complete each gap with a word from the list at the bottom of the page.

Warren Buffett

American billionaire Warren Buffett showed a talent for money and business from a very early age.

When he was only six years old he six bottles of Coca Cola from his grandfather's shop for twenty five cents each. He then sold them to his friends for thirty cents, which him a total profit of thirty cents. While other children were the same age were playing games, Warren was making money.

By the he left school at the age of 17 he had already earned \$5,000 from a part time job delivering newspapers. Many years he met the President of Coca Cola and invested in the company. On this Warren Buffett made a profit of more than a billion dollars. Soon afterwards he the richest man in America.

Example:

| | | | | | |
|--------|--------|---------|----------|------|--------|
| showed | time | started | occasion | gave | opened |
| | bought | moment | became | who | later |

Part 4

For the final task, it is necessary to scroll the reading text to see all of it. Do this by clicking on the side bar (as shown) and move the bar up and down.

Select the appropriate heading from the drop-down list on the left-hand side.

Read the passage quickly. Choose a heading for each numbered paragraph (1-7) from the drop-down box. There is one more heading than you need.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Bone Wars

In the summer of 1868 a train carrying a group of American scientists made its way through the western frontier state of Wyoming. On board was O.C. Marsh, an expert in geology and the first person in the country to hold the position of professor of palaeontology at the University of Yale. Like his fellow passengers, Marsh was impressed by the enormous landscapes of dry rock, and he knew that the ancient stones must hold evidence of prehistoric life. It was during this journey that he made a decision that was to have a lasting impact not only on his own professional career but on the American scientific community.

1. In 1800 the French naturalist Georges Cuvier identified a fossil [old bone] as the remains of a small flying reptile. This was the first recorded example of a species that later became known as the dinosaur. Although these creatures no longer existed, Cuvier showed that they could be studied through an examination of fossil records, buried and preserved in rock. So the science of palaeontology – the study of prehistoric life – began.

2. Over the next two decades some spectacular finds were made by English

Reading test answer key

Part 1

Dear Morgan,

Thank you for a wonderful weekend. I had a really time with you and

Becky. Your wife is a good cook and she a very nice dinner.

I am writing this note in my hotel room and I can the park from my

window. My plane leaves tomorrow and I will take a taxi to the airport

breakfast. I hope you and Becky will come and with me in Rome next

summer. I am feeling a little tired now and I to have a sleep.

Thanks again and see you soon,

James

Part 2

- 1 **Alfred Hitchcock was born in London in 1899.**
- 2 He got his first job in a film studio when he was a young man.
- 3 At the start of his career he made silent films in England and Germany.
- 4 He made a big impact when he directed *Blackmail*, which was Britain's first sound film and a big success.
- 5 After directing several more popular films, he sailed to America.
- 6 He was soon one of Hollywood's top directors and in 1956 he became an American citizen.
- 7 At the end of his long career he returned to Britain to make a film in London.

Part 3

Warren Buffett

American billionaire Warren Buffett **showed** a talent for money and business from a very early age. When he was only six years old he **bought** six bottles of Coca Cola from his grandfather's shop for twenty five cents each. He then sold them to his friends for thirty cents, which **gave** him a total profit of thirty cents. While other children **who** were the same age were playing games, Warren was making money. By the **time** he left school at the age of 17 he had already earned \$5,000 from a part time job delivering newspapers. Many years **later** he met the President of Coca Cola and invested in the company. On this **occasion** Warren Buffett made a profit of more than a billion dollars. Soon afterwards he **became** the richest man in America.

Example:

showed

started

moment

opened

Part 4

- 1 ▼
- 2 ▼
- 3 ▼
- 4 ▼
- 5 ▼
- 6 ▼
- 7 ▼

Aptis listening test

The listening test has 25 separate questions focusing on different aspects of listening.

There are a number of things to remember about the listening test:

1. All 25 questions use the four-option multiple-choice format.
2. Each listening input has a single question.
3. You may listen to the question a second time if you need to.
4. The three types of questions are described below. In the test itself, these types of questions do not appear in the correct sequence.

| Test design | | Description | Preparation |
|-------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Part 1 | Word and number recognition | In these questions the candidate listens to a short input in the form of a phone message and needs to identify specific information. This might be a number (e.g. phone, time) or a word (e.g. identifying the difference between 30 and 13). | Visit the British Council's LearnEnglish website for lots of very useful activities, tips, Apps and podcasts: http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en The elementary podcasts are useful preparation for these questions. |
| Part 2 | Literal meaning | The emphasis in these questions is on detail. The candidate listens to short conversations with two speakers or to a monologue. The focus is on identifying specific information such as what to buy at the shop or what plan the speakers decide on (e.g. go to a movie). | There are quite a few useful practice videos and podcasts on the LearnEnglish website, so that's a very good starting point. For teenagers, there's a special LearnEnglish site, with a lot of additional practice material. In addition, it may be useful to try to listen to as much English in natural or near-natural settings (e.g. films) as possible. If you have access to the internet, you can easily find materials, for example on the BBC website (www.bbc.co.uk). If not, try radio stations such as the BBC World Service. |
| Part 3 | Inference meaning | In these questions the candidate again listens to short conversations with two speakers or to a monologue. The focus here is not on understanding the meaning of what the speakers are saying, but on identifying clues in their language or tone to help identify the attitude of the speaker, their intention or mood. | There are a number of higher-level podcasts on the LearnEnglish website. Also try the BBC website or the BBC World Service radio station. The strategies you will need to develop to draw inferences in listening will include paying specific attention to intonation and stress when somebody is speaking to understand what mood they are in. Listening to authentic speech such as television soap operas or films is a good way to help you with this. |

Sample listening questions

All of the listening questions look quite similar, though they are often focused on different aspects of listening.

Remember that if you'd like to hear a question for a second time just click on the Play button:



The system will not allow you to listen more than twice.

Part 1

Listen to the message. What is Alberto's phone number?

Play

A ☐ 8440 3860

B ☐ 8440 3868

C ☐ 8440 3660

D ☐ 8440 3668

Part 2

Listen to the message. Why does Heather call Steve?

Play

A ☐ To say thank you

B ☐ To say goodbye

C ☐ To say hello

D ☐ To say sorry

Part 3

Listen to a man talking about somebody. Who is he talking about?

Who is the man talking about ?

Play

A ☐ Someone at work

B ☐ A friend

C ☐ A member of his family

D ☐ A stranger

Aptis writing test

The writing test is built around a series of interrelated activities. Typical activities include joining a club or applying for a visa.

There are four parts, which range from very basic form filling to quite complex email messages. They are explained below.

Make sure you fully understand the questions. Plan what you are going to write and then edit your writing before clicking to the next question. The most common mistakes are the following:

- Not answering the questions (going off-topic). Read the question and understand what you are required to do.
- Writing too much but with poor grammar, spelling and punctuation. Keep to the word count and focus on accuracy.
- Not using a variety of sentence structures.
- Not writing in sentences or paragraphs.
- Not capitalising months, cities, countries and names.
- Using SMS spelling.

The total time allowed for the writing test is 50 minutes. The timings for each section below are recommendations only.

| Test design | Description | Preparation |
|---|---|---|
| Part 1 Word-level writing | In the first task the candidate must complete a form by filling in some basic personal information. There is no extended writing in this task (no sentence writing), just individual words. Candidates should spend no more than three minutes on this task. | Since the emphasis in this task is on the accurate completion of a form, the most important things to focus on are using capital letters if needed and spelling. Common errors are to write in all capital letters and to write the month as a number instead of word. There is an App on the LearnEnglish website which helps you to practise your spelling. |
| Part 2 Short text writing | This task is again about form filling – but this time the candidate's response should be in the form of sentences. Candidates should spend no more than seven minutes on this task. | You are asked to write 20–30 words. The focus is on writing sentences that are on-topic and have accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling. A common error is to write more than 30 words and make too many mistakes. Keep to the word limit and focus on accuracy. Another common error is to write in all capital letters. |
| Part 3 Three written parts of text, which all require responses | In this task you will have a social network-type interaction. You will receive three questions and need to respond. Candidates should spend no more than ten minutes on this task. | Make sure you correctly answer all three questions and don't go off-topic. Focus on accurate spelling and punctuation and write text that is cohesive and coherent. Keep to the word count of approximately 40 words per answer. |
| Part 4 Formal and informal text writing | This task requires that you write an informal email to a friend and a more formal email. Both emails are in reaction to information about a change. Candidates should spend no more than 20 minutes on this task. | For this part, make sure you keep to the word count of 50 words for the first email and 120–150 words for the second email. Differentiate your two messages. One should clearly be an informal email to a friend or close family member, while the second should clearly be a formal email to a company. You are also assessed on how broadly and accurately you can write so use a wide range of vocabulary, grammar and cohesive devices. |

Sample writing tests

Part 1

This test is marked by an examiner and five pieces of information are awarded points.

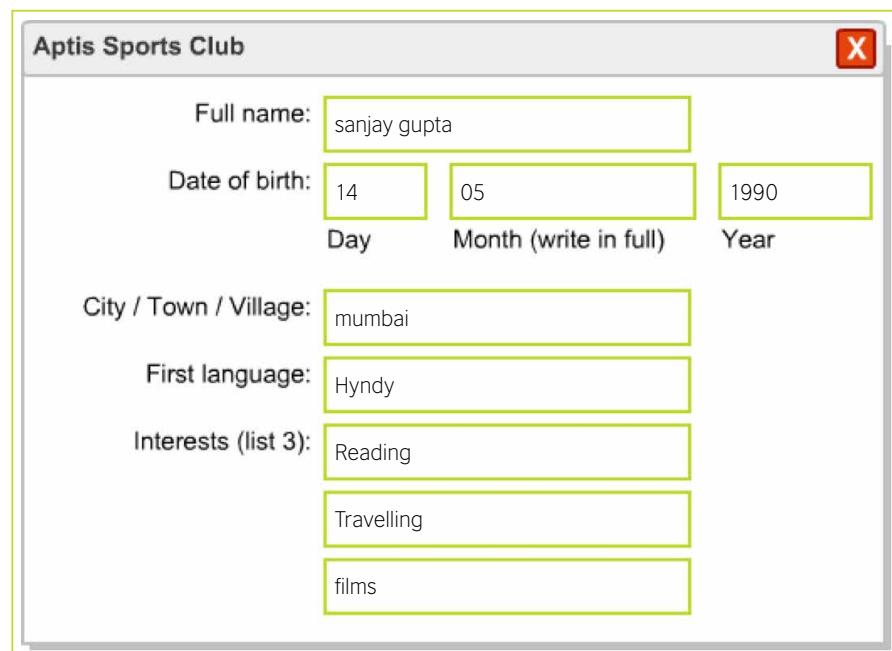
It is worth remembering that this task is the least valuable to the candidate, with a conversion table being used to provide its contribution to the overall score. Even if you achieve five points, the maximum number of marks available is three.

Example of a high-level answer (5/5) for Part 1:

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Aptis Sports Club" with a red close button in the top right corner. The form contains the following fields and answers:

- Full name:** Sanjay Gupta
- Date of birth:** 14 (Day), May (Month (write in full)), 1990 (Year)
- City / Town / Village:** Mumbai
- First language:** Hindi
- Interests (list 3):** reading, architecture, movies

- Uses capital letters for name, month, city and first language.
- No spelling errors.
- Answers the five questions accurately.

Example of low-level answer (1/5) for Part 1:

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Aptis Sports Club" with a red close button in the top right corner. The form contains several input fields with the following data entered:

- Full name:** sanjay gupta
- Date of birth:**
 - Day:** 14
 - Month (write in full):** 05
 - Year:** 1990
- City / Town / Village:** mumbai
- First language:** Hyndy
- Interests (list 3):**
 - Reading
 - Travelling
 - films

- No capital letters for name.
- Does not write the month in full.
- No capital letter for city.
- Spelling error (Hyndy should be Hindi).
- It is acceptable to write your interests in small or capital letters.

Part 2


This test is marked by an examiner using a specific scale.

There may be one or two questions.

The weighting for this task is even, so the maximum mark available is five.

| | |
|----------|--|
| 5 | Likely to be above A2 level |
| 4 [A2.2] | Clearly defined sentences, all on-topic. Mostly accurate grammar with few serious errors of vocabulary usage (appropriateness and spelling). The text organisation is completely appropriate. Attempts at textual cohesion and accurate punctuation. |
| 3 [A2.1] | There are some serious issues with grammar and vocabulary usage. However, the meaning is still clear. Text is written in complete sentences, organised appropriately for the text form and mostly accurate punctuation. |
| 2 [A1.2] | Numerous serious errors of grammar and vocabulary usage, which make the text sometimes difficult to follow. A series of phrases, not sentences. Poor punctuation. |
| 1 [A1.1] | There is too little language or the usage is so poor that the text is almost impossible to follow. There is no clear structure. |
| 0 | Little or no meaningful language or the work is off-topic. |

Example of a high level 5/5 response for Part 2:



WRITING

You are doing a language course. Fill in the form.
Write in sentences. Use 20-30 words. You have 7 minutes.

Aptis Language Club X

Please write here about your free time and interests.

I am a big football fan and like to play and watch matches whenever possible. I'm also keen on politics and try to keep up to date with current affairs.

- Keeps to the word count (20–30 words).
- Clear sentences.
- Answers on-topic. Replies fully to the input.
- Accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation. It is acceptable to have grammar and spelling errors and still score 5/5 if the errors are not serious (i.e. the writing can be understood and the errors are not basic).

Part 3

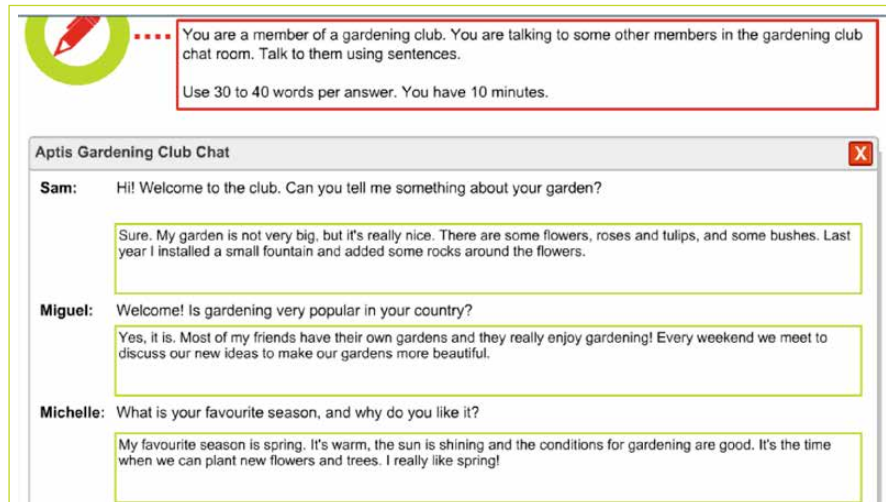
The weighting for this task means that the maximum mark available is seven.

The screenshots show the following sequence of questions and responses:

- Question 1:** "Hi! I hear you are a new member of our club. I have been a member for about 2 years after my friend gave me a year's membership as a gift. Why did you join?"
- Response 1:** "I joined because I really love sports and I want to become a professional soccer player. I also love the friends that I can make in a club. To be honest, I'd be very bored just sitting around watching TV and I know I need to be doing some exercise regularly, otherwise I'd go crazy."
- Question 2:** "I love it. How do you feel about the club?"
- Response 2:** "I really think it's great as well. I really like the other members and the facilities are fantastic. The gym is great but the soccer pitch is not the best I have to say. The guy who cuts the grass is not so good, as he regularly misses patches and it can be difficult to play."
- Question 3:** "I agree. What do you think about the swimming pool closing?"

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 | Likely to be above the B1 level |
| 4 [B1.2] | Replies fully to each piece of input. The grammar is appropriate to B1 and is mostly accurate, while there is a good range of vocabulary on general topics. Some errors, but these don't impede communication. Cohesive and coherent text using an appropriate range of linguistic devices. Few, if any, punctuation or spelling errors. |
| 3 [B1.1] | Replies well to at least two of the input texts. An adequate range of grammar used with no major errors which impact on understanding. There is good control of elementary vocabulary, though evidence of some major errors when expressing unfamiliar or complex topics. Cohesive and coherent text using an adequate range of linguistic devices. Spelling and/or punctuation errors do not impede communication. |
| 2 [A2.2] | Replies to at least two of the input texts. Many errors, which make the text sometimes difficult to follow. Narrow lexical repertoire with frequent errors making the message difficult to follow. Some effort to use connecting devices though not always consistent. Errors, including punctuation and spelling, make the text difficult to follow. |
| 1 [A2.1] | Does not reply to more than one input. There is little language with such poor control as to make the text almost impossible to follow without considerable effort. Very basic everyday vocabulary. Lacks cohesion and/or uses linguistic devices inappropriately. Spelling and punctuation errors make the text almost impossible to follow. |
| 0 | Little or no meaningful language or the work is off-topic. |

Example of a high level 5/5 response for Part 3:



You are a member of a gardening club. You are talking to some other members in the gardening club chat room. Talk to them using sentences.

Use 30 to 40 words per answer. You have 10 minutes.

Aptis Gardening Club Chat

Sam: Hi! Welcome to the club. Can you tell me something about your garden?

Sure. My garden is not very big, but it's really nice. There are some flowers, roses and tulips, and some bushes. Last year I installed a small fountain and added some rocks around the flowers.

Miguel: Welcome! Is gardening very popular in your country?

Yes, it is. Most of my friends have their own gardens and they really enjoy gardening! Every weekend we meet to discuss our new ideas to make our gardens more beautiful.

Michelle: What is your favourite season, and why do you like it?

My favourite season is spring. It's warm, the sun is shining and the conditions for gardening are good. It's the time when we can plant new flowers and trees. I really like spring!

- Keeps to the word count (30–40 words for each answer).
- Replies fully to each piece of input.
- Sentences follow on from one another in a coherent manner.
- Uses a range of grammar and vocabulary.
- Accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling. It is ok to have errors but the writing must be understood.

Part 4

The weighting for this task means that the maximum mark available is nine.

| | |
|----------|--|
| 5 | Likely to be above the B2 level |
| 4 [B2.2] | Task fulfilled in terms of appropriateness of register [i.e. two distinct registers used in the different messages written]. Evidence of a clear, assured and precise use of a broad range of grammatical forms used. A good command of a broad lexicon. Good use of idiomatic expressions and no impeding errors of grammar or lexis. Few if any errors of cohesion or coherence. |
| 3 [B2.1] | Task partially fulfilled in terms of appropriateness of register [i.e. fully appropriate register used in one of the two different messages written]. An adequate range of grammatical forms used, with no impeding errors. A good range of lexis with a high level of accuracy. Errors don't affect the message. Cohesive and coherent text using an adequate range of linguistic devices. Spelling and/or punctuation errors evident but these don't affect the message. |
| 2 [B1.2] | Task not fulfilled in terms of appropriateness of register [i.e. appropriate register not used in either of the two different messages written]. A relatively narrow range of grammatical forms used, with some impeding errors. The lexical range adequate for the description of situations relating to him/herself. Some errors which tend to make understanding difficult. Attempts to use linguistic devices not always consistent. Errors, including punctuation and spelling, can make understanding difficult. |
| 1 [B1.1] | Task not fulfilled in terms of appropriateness of register [i.e. no evidence of awareness of register]. A limited range of grammatical forms and vocabulary used and not always with sufficient accuracy. Errors may make the text difficult to follow. Lacks systematic cohesion and/or uses linguistic devices inappropriately. Spelling and punctuation errors can make understanding difficult. |
| 0 | Clearly below B level or work is off-topic. |

'Register' refers to the concept of adapting one's use of language to conform to standards or traditions in a given professional or social situation.

The first part is an intimate or casual register used among family members and close friends. The second part is a formal register used between strangers or in a technical context.

There should be language to show the test taker understands the difference. In the second part it is appropriate to address the email more formally.

Example of a high level 5/5 response for Part 4:

You are a member of a sports club. On your last visit to the club you saw the notice below.

Dear Members,

We are sorry to tell you that from next month membership fees will go up by a minimum of 15%. Also, due to maintenance the club will close from 4pm on Wednesdays for the next four weeks. Please feel free to email us at kjmn@goodhealth.com

Write an email to a friend. Write your feelings about the notice and suggest possible alternatives. Write 50 words. You have 10 minutes.

Hey Olga, what do you think about the fee increase at the sports club? I can't believe they are increasing the fees and closing early. If you ask me the gym should offer a discount if they plan to close early. I just signed up and already a fee increase! Not happy!! Maria

Also write an email to the Customer Service Team, explaining your feelings about the notice and suggesting possible alternatives. Write 120-150 words. You have 20 minutes.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to complain about the fee increase to take effect from next month and your plan to close early on Wednesdays.

I have been a member for only three months and feel it is unacceptable to increase the fee so soon after signing up while also closing early on Wednesdays, which is one of the days when I like to go to the sports club and meet my personal trainer.

I think you should rethink the fee increase if you are withdrawing services. One alternative is to implement the fee increase after you have completed the maintenance. Another alternative is to complete the maintenance after the gym is closed at 10pm.

I look forward to hearing back from you if my recommendations are acceptable. If not, I will look to another sports club for my membership.

Regards,
Maria

- Understands the difference in writing to a friend as opposed to writing to an authority. The first text is casual and the second text is formal.
- Answers the input in a coherent manner. The text makes sense.
- Writing is clear, assured and precise using a range of cohesive devices to make the writing flow.
- Grammar and vocabulary is broad and accurate.

Aptis speaking test

The different parts are designed to assess your speaking ability in different ways, and test higher processes as the test progresses.

Each question has a maximum response time but candidates can choose to end the recording before the allotted time by clicking on a stop button. Note that if you finish early, you may not have given enough of a range to score at the highest levels.

The most common issues that cause candidates to lose marks are the following:

- not doing a proper sound check
- not speaking clearly
- not answering the questions
- giving under-length answers – not using the full amount of time to speak
- overusing words such as ‘and’ and ‘so’
- speaking in simple sentence lists
- not using a variety of sentence structures.

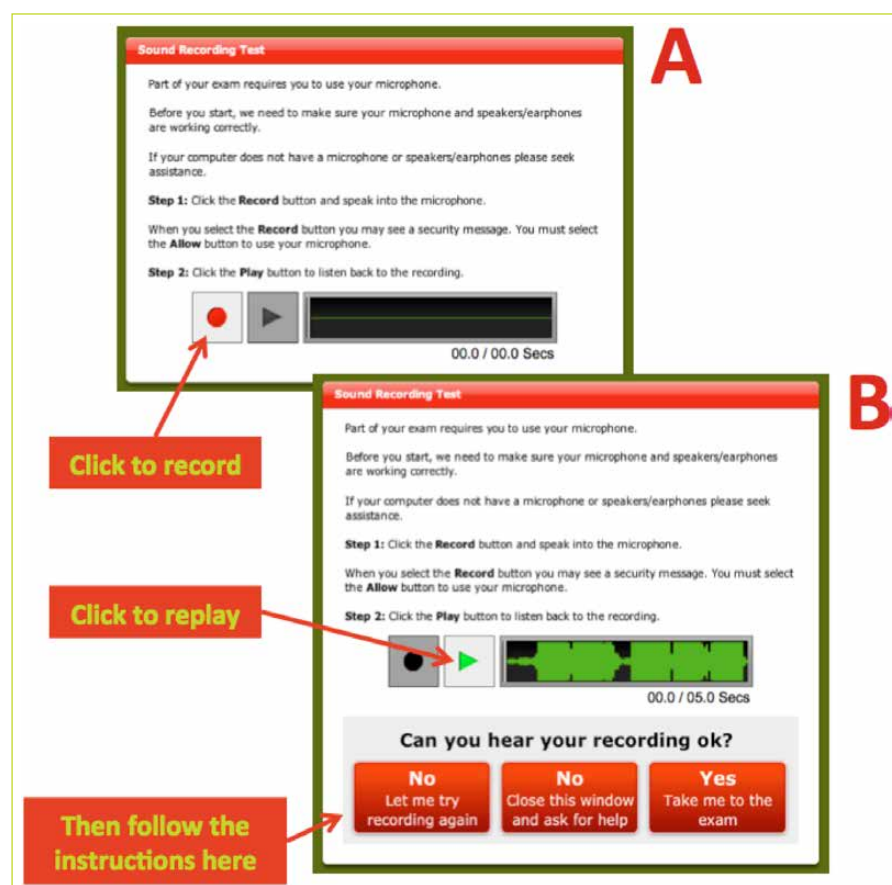
| Test design | | Description | Preparation |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Part 1 | Personal information-giving | In this task, the candidate is asked to respond to three questions on personal topics. You are expected to talk for 30 seconds per question. | To prepare for this task it is a good idea to practise introducing yourself and talking about your personal experiences. Think about familiar topics (e.g. holidays, weekend activities, sports) and practise giving general information. At the highest levels, try not to talk in lists but instead use connecting devices, complex sentences and a wide range of grammar. |
| Part 2 | Describe and compare (concrete topic) | In this task the candidate is asked to describe a photograph and then answer two questions related to the topic illustrated in the photo. The topic will be concrete in nature (e.g. a celebration). The three questions increase in complexity (from description to opinion). You are expected to talk for 45 seconds per question. | You should try to be fluent and spontaneous, showing little sign of effort. Try to vary your intonation and sentence stress to express finer shades of meaning. At the highest levels, errors should be rare and difficult to spot. |
| Part 3 | Describe, compare and speculate | In this task the candidate is asked to compare two pictures and then answer two questions related to the topic. The final question is likely to involve hypothesis and speculation. You are expected to talk for 45 seconds for each question. | To prepare for this task, it is a good idea to practise comparing two different things (e.g. two cities or two houses). Focus on describing their advantages and disadvantages. With speculation, it is important to make sure you are using the correct grammatical structures to express yourself and your opinion. |
| Part 4 | Discuss an abstract topic | In the final task there's a prompt supported by a picture, though the picture is not central to answering the task. The candidate is asked three questions related to a single topic and is given one minute to prepare an answer. You can take notes. You are expected to talk for two minutes. | A common error is to describe the photo. You will not receive a high score if you describe the photo. The questions are more abstract (e.g. a feeling). Another common error is to go off-topic. Focus on answering each question in a clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech. To prepare for this task it is a good idea to practise speaking for two minutes on a certain topic. Time yourself. Make sure you practise using your planning time wisely to structure what you are going to say. |

Sound recording

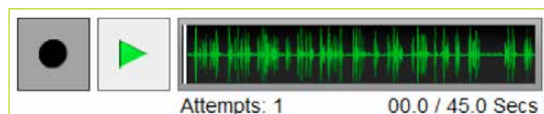
Make sure your test is taken in a quiet room.

When you click to start the speaking test, screen A appears. This allows you to check the sound recording system on your computer. When you have recorded a sample of speech, screen B opens. Replay the sound. If you can hear it properly click on Yes (take me to the exam), if not click on No (let me try recording again).

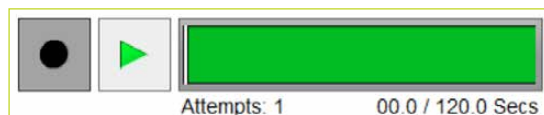
During the microphone check, make sure you say a whole sentence and not just one or two words. Assessing the quality of the microphone needs more than a few words.



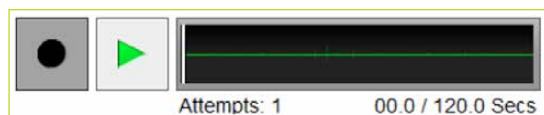
The recording bar should look like this:



If the line takes up all the space, then there is a loud noise (usually a technical issue) and we are not able to hear the recording. You should alert the invigilator if the recording bar looks like this:



If the recording is a flat line then the recording is not loud enough. The microphone may be too far from the mouth. A complete flat line means there is no recording, which is usually a technical issue. You should alert the invigilator if the recording looks like this:



Speaking scale

| | |
|--------|---|
| 5 [C] | <p>Consistently high level of grammatical and lexical range and accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot.</p> <p>Clear, effective pronunciation and intonation; varies intonation and sentence stress correctly to express finer shades of meaning.</p> <p>Fluent and spontaneous, with little or no sign of effort.</p> <p>Clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, with controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</p> |
| 4 [B2] | <p>Sufficient range and control of grammatical forms and lexis to express ideas without much conspicuous hesitation, using some complex forms to do so. No mistakes lead to misunderstanding.</p> <p>Has clear, effective pronunciation and intonation.</p> <p>Stretches of language with fairly even tempo; can be hesitant when searching for patterns and expressions, fairly long pauses possible.</p> <p>Uses a limited number of cohesive devices to link utterances into clear, coherent discourse; may be some 'jumpiness' when speaking.</p> |
| 3 [B1] | <p>Sufficient range and control of grammatical forms and lexis to get by, but there is hesitation, repetition and difficulty with formulation. A reasonably accurate repertoire of frequently used 'routines', patterns and words associated with more predictable situations, but major errors still occur when expressing more complex thoughts.</p> <p>Pronunciation is intelligible though the accent means that occasional mispronunciations occur.</p> <p>Keeps going comprehensibly; pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident in longer stretches of production.</p> <p>Links a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.</p> |
| 2 [A2] | <p>Control of basic grammatical forms and lexis, but may have to compromise the message and take time to formulate structures. Uses some simple structures and lexis correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes (e.g. tends to mix up tenses and does not conjugate verbs correctly; sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs only). Meaning clear.</p> <p>Pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood despite a noticeable accent and occasional difficulty for the listener.</p> <p>Constructs phrases on familiar topics despite very noticeable hesitation and false starts.</p> <p>Links groups of words with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.</p> |
| 1 [A1] | <p>Very basic range of simple forms with only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learned repertoire. Basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases related to particular concrete situations.</p> <p>Pronunciation of a very limited range of words and phrases can be understood with some effort.</p> <p>Manages very short, isolated utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.</p> <p>Little attempt to link words or groups of words; when it happens uses very basic linear connectors like 'and' or 'then'.</p> |
| 0 | No or incomprehensible or irrelevant answer |

The key things to notice here are:

- grammar accuracy
- vocabulary accuracy
- good pronunciation
- fluency – the fewer hesitations and stops the better, but don't talk too quickly
- good structure – it shouldn't sound like you are rambling with different bits of unconnected speech.

Part 1

In this task you first hear (and see) the question. Only box A appears on the screen.

When this is finished you hear (and see) the first question (box B). When the time to record comes, the recording box appears immediately below the question box. This tells you the amount of time you have been recording for (in this case just over four seconds) and the total time for the task (in this case 30 seconds).

As each new question appears, the same procedure is followed (boxes C and D)

The screenshot displays the Aptis speaking test interface. It shows three questions, each with a recording box and a timer. The questions are:

- Box A:** Part One. In this part I'm going to ask you three short questions about yourself and your interests. You will have 30 seconds to reply to each question. Begin speaking when you hear this sound.
- Box B:** Please tell me about your family.
- Box C:** What do you like doing in your free time?
- Box D:** What's the weather like today?

Each question is followed by a recording box with a green bar and a timer showing 04.4 / 30.0 Secs.

When your response to the final question has been recorded, the test automatically moves on to the next task. You do not need to click on any button to make this happen.

Note: all Aptis speaking questions follow this set of procedures. In the following screenshots we have not included the recording boxes, but they will appear in each case when the question has been read.

Part 2

In this task you first hear the contents of the top box – telling you about the task.

When this has been heard, the first of the three questions appears. When this question has been heard the recording box appears and you should begin speaking. You will have up to 45 seconds for your answer.

When that question has been recorded, the next question automatically appears. Again, as soon as it has been heard, the recording box appears and the recording begins. This question also allows for a response up to 45 seconds.

When the recording time for the second question is done, the final question appears. When you have heard the question, the recording box appears and you again have 45 seconds to respond.

Part Two. In this part I'm going to ask you to describe a picture. Then I will ask you two questions about it. You will have 45 seconds for each response. Begin speaking when you hear this sound.

Describe this picture.

Why is it important to celebrate special occasions with family or friends?

Tell me about a celebration in your country.



When your response to the third question has been recorded, the test automatically moves on to the next task. You do not need to click on any button to make this happen.

Part 3

In this task you will again hear the contents of the top box.

When this has been heard, the first of the three questions appears. When this question has been heard, the recording box appears and you should begin speaking. You will have up to 45 seconds for your answer.

When that question has been recorded, the next question automatically appears. Again, as soon as it has been heard, the recording box appears and the recording begins. This question also allows for a response up to 45 seconds.

When the recording time for the second question is done, the final question appears. When you have heard the question, the recording box appears and you again have 45 seconds to respond.

Part Three. In this part I'm going to ask you to compare two pictures, and I will then ask you two questions about them. You will have 45 seconds for each response. Begin speaking when you hear this sound.

Tell me what you see in the two pictures.

Which of these two places would it be better to bring children up in?

What would it be like to live in these two places?



When your response to the third question has been recorded, the test automatically moves on to the next task. You do not need to click on any button to make this happen.

Part 4

In this task you will yet again hear the contents of the top box.

When this has been heard, you will be read (and can see) the three questions.

When the questions have been heard, the voice tells you that you have one minute to prepare your responses. You will also be told that you may take notes. It is important to take notes, as it will help you in organising and remembering your responses.

Rather than writing out exactly what you want to say, make brief notes and use these to help structure your speech.

There is a minute's silence as you prepare. A progress bar on the screen will indicate how long you have left. When this time has passed, the message at the bottom ('You now have two minutes to talk') appears, as will the recording box. You may speak until the recording automatically stops.

Part Four. In this part I'm going to show you a picture and ask you three questions. You will have one minute to think about your answers before you start speaking. You will have two minutes to answer all three questions. Begin speaking when you hear this sound. Look at the photograph.

Tell me about a personal achievement or award you have received.
How did you feel about this achievement?
Do awards encourage people to do their best?

**THIS MESSAGE IS
SPOKEN ONLY**

**You now have a minute
to prepare your answer.
You may take notes.**



You now have two minutes to talk

Example of note taking for Part 4

1. Tell me about a personal achievement or award you have received.
 - exam certificate
 - at school
 - highest score in class
 - teacher very pleased
 - parents proud.
2. How did you feel about this achievement?
 - surprised
 - exam was very difficult
 - feelings of satisfaction and relief.
3. Do awards encourage people to do their best?
 - awards: a good thing
 - encourage excellence
 - evidence/recognition of success.
 - awards: a bad thing
 - make some people too competitive
 - can create disappointment if you don't win.

When your response to the three questions has been recorded, the test automatically finishes.

Special needs

The British Council cares about candidates with special needs and fairness to all candidates regardless of first language, gender, ethnicity, nationality or lifestyle.

Aptis has experience in delivering tests to candidates with special needs so that English language ability can be assessed objectively, regardless of any disability.

If you require a modified version of a test (e.g. Braille version, extended time), contact us at least four weeks before your test so we can discuss your needs and make suitable arrangements.

Checklist

We hope that these notes have helped you prepare for your Aptis test. Here is a checklist to make sure you are fully prepared:

- review the different grammar parts:
http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/eaquals2011/documents/EAQUALS_British_Council_Core_Curriculum_April2011.pdf
- visit the LearnEnglish website to prepare for the grammar test:
<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en>
- visit the English Club to prepare for the vocabulary test:
www.englishclub.com
- review the sections on 'Getting to grips with the online test' and 'Sound Recording' and do a practice test so that you are familiar with the test structure and software:
www.britishcouncil.org/exams/aptis
- do the sample tests in this booklet to get more experience with the structure of the tests
- practise your English skills at every opportunity. Listen to English radio (e.g. BBC World Service), watch English-language television and films and read the graded readers (e.g. Cambridge, Penguin, Macmillan and Headway)
- read the tips in this booklet on how to prepare for each test.

Feedback

We value your feedback, so after your test you will be given the opportunity to complete a survey. We thank you in advance for your useful comments.

For more information please go to www.britishcouncil.org

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