

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations

# Business English Certificates

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*Information for Candidates*

**BEC PRELIMINARY**



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE  
ESOL Examinations

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English for Speakers of Other Languages

# Information for Candidates – BEC Preliminary

## 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 are for individual learners who want to have 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 Preliminary is set at Level B1 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, so a Cambridge ESOL examination is a valuable qualification.

- **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 some practice material to help you prepare for BEC Preliminary, 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](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/pastpapers.htm)

## What does BEC Preliminary involve?

This booklet is a brief introduction to BEC Preliminary. If you would like to see a full sample paper for BEC Preliminary, you can download one from our website at: [www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/dloads/bec\\_downloads.htm](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/dloads/bec_downloads.htm)

The table below shows the different parts of BEC Preliminary and how long each paper takes. In BEC Preliminary, Reading and Writing are combined on one question paper.

<i>Name of paper</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Reading and Writing	Reading: 7 parts/45 items Writing: 2 tasks	1 hour 30 minutes	Reading: 25% Writing: 25%
Listening	4 parts/30 items	about 40 minutes including transfer time	25%
Speaking	3 parts	12 minutes (2:2 format*)	25%

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

## ■ Reading and Writing

Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

### ■ Reading

The Reading section has the following types of exercise: multiple-choice, matching, Right/Wrong/Doesn't Say, multiple-choice gap-filling and form-filling. Reading is worth 25% of the total marks.

#### *Part One (5 questions)*

In this part there are five short texts, each of which has a multiple-choice question containing three options. In all cases the information will be brief and clear. To answer the question correctly, you have to identify or interpret the meaning of the text.

A wide variety of text types typical of international business situations can appear in this part. Each text will be complete and have a recognisable context. Below are two examples of the type of text you will find. You have to choose the correct answer from the three options given (A, B or C) and mark it on your Answer Sheet. There are three more texts and questions like this one in the exam.

1

#### **Office Staff Required**

**Experience essential  
Full training given (leading to  
recognised qualifications)**

Applicants must have

- A** relevant qualifications.
- B** previous experience.
- C** recognised training.

#### **SPORTMASTER**

Pakistan-based manufacturer of sports items wishing to do  
business in Europe is looking for importers

**TEL: 92 555 4321**

Sportmaster wants to

- A** sell its products abroad.
- B** import products into Pakistan.
- C** manufacture in Europe.

### Part Two (5 questions)

This is a matching task with one text and five questions which are often descriptions of people's requirements. This section of the test is about vocabulary and meaning. There are more possible answers than questions, so you won't have to use all of them.

In the example below, you have to read an advertisement which shows services offered by a business consultancy. You have to match each question (6, 7 and 8) to the right part of the advertisement text (labelled A-H). In the exam, there are two more questions like these.

#### THINKING OF STARTING A BUSINESS?

Need expert advice and/or assistance in one or more of the following areas?

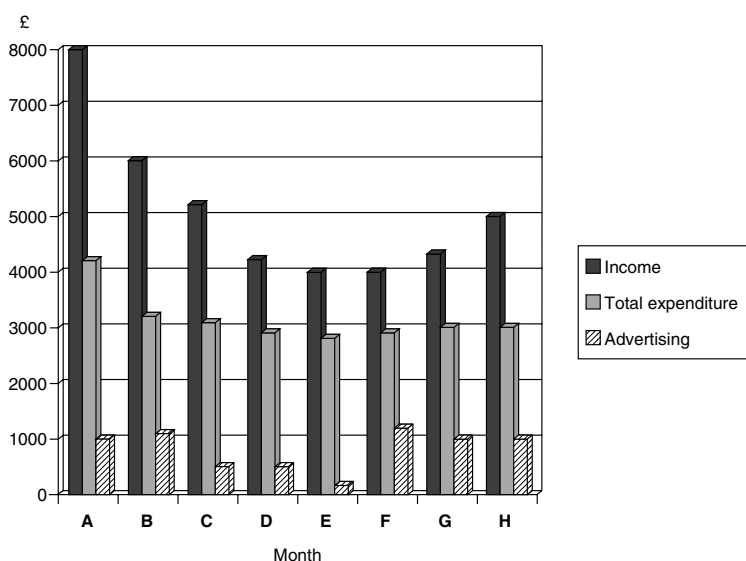
- A Market Research
- B Constructing a schedule
- C Calculating costs
- D Meeting legal requirements
- E Obtaining finance
- F Renting or purchasing premises
- G Recruiting and training staff
- H Promoting products and services

- 6 Margaret Williams needs help in choosing the business loan with the most competitive terms.
- 7 Ibrahim Shah wants to be sure that there will be enough demand for his product.
- 8 Maria Fernandez would like some advice about where to advertise a new line of goods.

### Part Three (5 questions)

This task consists of eight graphs or charts (or one or more graphics with eight distinct elements) and five questions. In the example below, you can see the income of a restaurant, total expenditure and advertising costs during an eight-month period. The months are labelled A-H.

For each sentence (11-13), you have to say which month it describes. You may not use any letter (A-H) more than once. There are two more questions like the ones below in the exam.



- 11 In this month, total expenditure, like income, showed a fall, while spending on advertising demonstrated the opposite trend.
- 12 Total expenditure rose slightly in this month, while advertising costs reached their peak, leading to a higher income in the following month.
- 13 Despite a decline in advertising costs this month, expenditure as a whole rose.

### Part Four (7 questions)

This is a text with seven multiple-choice questions. Each question presents a statement and you have to say whether the statement is A 'Right' or B 'Wrong' according to the text and mark it on your Answer Sheet. If the information is not given in the text, the answer is C, 'Doesn't say'.

You don't have to understand every word in the text but you should be able to pick out the important points and work out the meaning. Read each statement and the text and choose A, B or C for each question (16–18). The example below is an advertisement for a hot drinks machine. In the exam, there are four more questions like the ones below.

#### ADVERTISING FEATURE

### Save money and keep your staff happy

It can be expensive to keep the canteen open to serve drinks to your staff through the day. Our QVM hot drinks machine replaces this service, so that you can close the canteen between mealtimes.

You can install the QVM hot drinks machine anywhere in the building. One machine is suitable for a staff of ten to fifteen people. It costs £1300 to buy, or £11.00 per week to rent over 60 months. It is not expensive to operate: for example, the cost of power for one day is 30p, nearly as cheap as the price of one hot drink from the machine.

Our company will carry out a weekly service, at a charge of £10.00. We can also refill the machine with drinks ingredients for an extra charge of £8.00. Some customers prefer to do this themselves, however.

There are eight choices of hot drink available from the QVM machine, and our company offers one month's trial free of charge, so that you can estimate how popular the machine will be and see what the actual savings are.

16 With a QVM machine, companies can avoid having a canteen altogether.

A Right      B Wrong      C Doesn't say

17 The QVM machine provides enough hot drinks for up to fifteen people.

A Right      B Wrong      C Doesn't say

18 Most customers prefer to rent the QVM machine over sixty months.

A Right      B Wrong      C Doesn't say

### Part Five (6 questions)

This is a single text with six multiple-choice comprehension questions. It is often from a leaflet, or from a newspaper or magazine article.

The example below is part of a review of a book called *The Bosses Speak*. For each question (23–25), you have to choose the correct answer (A, B or C). In the exam, there are three more questions like these.

## The Bosses Speak

John Stuart is an executive recruitment specialist who has turned to writing. The result is this book, based on interviews with twenty Chief Executives.

Each top manager – none of them famous names, surprisingly – is given a short chapter, and there is some introductory material and a conclusion. This means you can jump from one person to another, in any order, which is good for people who are too busy to read a book from cover to cover. For a management book it isn't expensive, although whether it's good value for money is doubtful.

Some of the twenty interviewees started their own businesses, while others joined a company and worked their way up. Some

are fairly new in their position, and others have had years of experience, though, strangely, Stuart doesn't seem interested in these differences. The interviewees work in everything, from retailing to airlines to software, and it is this variety that forms the main theme of Stuart's book.

I have to say that Stuart's approach annoys me. He rarely stays at a distance from his interviewees, who are mostly presented in their own, positive words. If this were always the case, at least you would know where you were. But he seems to dislike certain interviewees. As a result, I don't know whether to accept any of his opinions.

23 The reviewer suggests that one advantage of the book is that

- A it is better value than other management books.
- B it does not need to be read right through.
- C it is about well-known people.

24 The book concentrates on the fact that the twenty executives who are interviewed

- A work in a number of different industries.
- B started their companies.
- C have worked for different lengths of time.

25 The reviewer cannot accept Stuart's opinions because Stuart

- A makes unreasonable complaints about the interviewees.
- B writes too positively about the interviewees.
- C has different attitudes towards different interviewees.

### Part Six (12 questions)

In this part you have to select the correct word from three options to complete 12 gaps in the text. This part is largely about grammar. It tests your understanding of the general and detailed meaning of a text, and in particular your ability to analyse structural patterns.

The example below is part of a text about team-building. You have to choose the correct answer (A, B or C) for each of the questions (29–34). In the exam there are six more questions like the ones below.

## TEAM-BUILDING THROUGH ACTIVITIES

Nowadays, company bosses are increasingly trying to find unusual team-building events as part of their training programme. An activity park (29) ..... Fast-track has just opened to offer (30) ..... events. It specialises (31) ..... events to attract the corporate entertainment market, (32) ..... is growing all the time.

The park is situated just a few kilometres outside the city centre (33) ..... it provides events that (34) ..... entertain as well as train.

...

- |    |           |         |          |
|----|-----------|---------|----------|
| 29 | A calling | B calls | C called |
| 30 | A such    | B like  | C so     |
| 31 | A at      | B for   | C in     |
| 32 | A who     | B which | C what   |
| 33 | A and     | B but   | C or     |
| 34 | A ought   | B will  | C shall  |

### Part Seven (5 questions)

In this part you have two short texts, for example a memo and an advertisement, and you have to complete a form based on these texts. There are five gaps and you need a word, a number or a short phrase for each one. In this part, you have to extract relevant information and complete a form accurately. In the exam you need to transfer your answers (in CAPITAL LETTERS) to an Answer Sheet.

In the example below, you have to read the memo and the note. Then you should complete the Insurance Claim form (lines 41–45) on the next page. You need to write a word, a number or a phrase for each line.

#### MEMO

**TO:** Barbara Sinclair  
**FROM:** Peter Rogers  
**DATE:** 25 May 2002  
**SUBJECT:** Insurance Claim

Could you deal with this? It's our insurance claim, for the damage at the weekend. The insurance policy is in my name, and we bought the carpet for £300, although it will cost at least £500 to replace. Luckily our office carpets seem fine.

Thanks

#### OWEN SMITH INSURANCE COMPANY

*with compliments*

Thank you for your recent phone call regarding flood damage in your photocopy room.

Could you please complete the attached form and return it to me as soon as possible.

*Martin Morris*

## Insurance Claim

**NAME OF POLICY HOLDER:** (41) .....

**POLICY NUMBER:** LD4756030C

**ITEM(S) TO BE REPLACED:** (42) .....

**LOCATION OF ITEM(S):** (43) .....

**VALUE WHEN PURCHASED:** (44) .....

**CAUSE OF DAMAGE:** (45) .....

**DATE OF DAMAGE:** Sunday 19 May

### ■ Writing

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

- a piece of communication with a colleague or colleagues within the company on a business-related matter; it may be a note, message, memo or e-mail
- a piece of correspondence with somebody outside the company (e.g. a customer or supplier) on a business-related matter; it may be a letter, fax or e-mail.

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

#### Part One

Here you have to write a note, message, memo or e-mail. You should write 30–40 words and we give you a written prompt which explains why you are writing and who you are writing to. The layout of memos and e-mails (e.g. to/from/date/subject) is on the question paper and you don't have to copy this out as part of your answer. The bullet points explain what content points you should include. You will have to make up your own content to answer these points.

#### PART ONE

##### Question 46

- You are going to attend an engineering exhibition in Frankfurt soon.
- Write a **memo** to your assistant:
  - explaining why you will be away
  - letting her know the dates you will be away
  - saying what work she should do while you are away.
- **Write 30 – 40 words.**
- **Write on your Answer Sheet.**

## Part Two

You have to write a piece of business correspondence of between 60 and 80 words. For this you have to read a short text, such as a letter or advertisement and respond to it. There are some content points below the text to show you what you should include in the answer. You will have to invent some of the information you need.

In the example below you have to read part of a letter from Mary Bennett who is applying for a job. Read the instructions after the letter and write your reply.

With reference to your advertisement in *The Times*, I am writing to apply for the post of training assistant.

I am moving to your country next month with my husband. As you will see from the enclosed CV, I have had a lot of experience in training and I feel that I have much to offer your company.

If I am selected for interview, please could you give me information about how to reach your offices by public transport?

- Write a **letter** to Mrs Bennett:
  - acknowledging her letter
  - offering her a date and time for an interview
  - requesting the names and addresses of two referees
  - telling her the best way to reach you by public transport.
- Write **60 – 80 words**.
- Write on your **Answer Sheet**. Do not include any postal addresses.

## ■ Listening

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

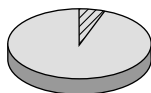
In the Listening section there are four tasks (multiple-choice, gap-filling and form-filling). Texts used are monologues and dialogues, including interviews, discussions, telephone conversations and messages. Listening is worth 25% of the total marks.

### Part One (8 questions)

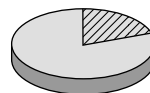
The eight questions in this part of the paper are multiple-choice questions. For each question, you will hear a short conversation or monologue, typically lasting around 15 to 30 seconds. The multiple-choice options may be texts or they may be in the form of pictures, graphs or diagrams.

In the extracts in Part One you have to show that you can understand spoken English in a range of situations and that you can find factual information. You may need to pick out a name or time or place. Alternatively, you may have to identify a trend in a graph, or a place on a map, or the location of an object in a room. There are seven more questions like the one below in the exam. You will hear the eight recordings twice.

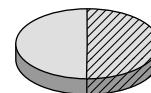
8 Which chart shows the company's market share this year?



A



B



C



### Part Two (7 questions)

This part consists of a short conversation or monologue. It usually lasts around a minute and a half and contains factual information. On the question paper there is a form, table, chart or set of notes with seven gaps where information is missing. The answers may include dates, prices, percentages or figures.

In the example below, you have to listen to the recording of a manager telephoning Human Resources about vacancies in his department. You should then complete each of the gaps (9–15) with a word, numbers or letters. You will hear the conversation twice.

Customer Services Vacancies	
NUMBER OF VACANCIES:	(9) ..... telephone operators
SALARY:	(10) Max. £ .....
TOTAL HOLIDAY (PER ANNUM):	(11) ..... days
JOB REFERENCE:	(12) .....
JOB START DATE:	(13) ..... 2002
LINE MANAGER:	(14) Ms Sue .....
TEL NUMBER (FOR ENQUIRIES):	(15) .....

### Part Three (7 questions)

You will hear a monologue. On the question paper there is a set of notes or a form with gaps. There are seven gaps to complete and the answers may be one or two words. Sometimes the key to one of the gaps may be a date. You will hear the talk twice.

For the example below, the recording is of part of a talk by the Marketing Director of a publishing company. You have to fill in the missing information in the notes about the Autumn promotion plans. You have to use one or two words for each question (16–22).

Autumn promotion plans	
Main titles: pocket dictionary and	(16) .....
Advertising space booked in	(17) ..... magazine
New colour for display stands:	(18) .....
Free gifts include	(19) ..... and keyrings
Alison has made a deal with	(20) .....
For mailing to booksellers in september:	(21) .....
Venue for dictionary launch party:	(22) .....

### Part Four (8 questions)

This part, which lasts about 3 minutes, contains a longer listening text. It is usually an interview or a discussion between two or possibly more speakers. There are eight multiple-choice questions on the question paper. In this part you have to show that you can understand the gist of a longer text and find detailed and specific information to answer the questions. You may also be tested on the speakers' opinions.

In the following example, Sue, a senior manager, is talking to her assistant, called David. You have to choose the correct answer (A, B or C) for each question (23–25). There are five more questions like the ones below in the exam. You will hear the conversation twice.

**23** Sue is particularly pleased about the company

- A** receiving an award.
- B** increasing its share price.
- C** getting a new client.

**24** What is the main cause of the company's rising costs?

- A** import taxes
- B** publicity
- C** premises

**25** Which expenses do they want to reduce?

- A** entertainment
- B** stationery
- C** telephone

At the end of the Listening test, you have 10 minutes to transfer all your answers to the Answer Sheet.

## ■ Speaking

Time: 12 minutes

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

### Part One

In the first part of the test, one of the examiners talks to each of you in turn and will ask you questions about yourselves and your opinions. In this part of the test, you will have to show that you can talk briefly about yourself, provide brief information on subjects such as your home, hobbies and jobs, and perform simple functions such as agreeing and disagreeing and expressing preferences.

## Part Two

The second part of the test is a 'mini-presentation'. In this part, you have a choice of two topics and one minute to prepare a speech lasting approximately one minute. After you have finished speaking, the other candidate is asked which of the bullet points (see sample topics below) they think is the most important.

**A: WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN...?**

Looking for a new job

- Location
- Salary
- Good Colleagues

**B: WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN...?**

Choosing a business club to join

- Numbers of Members
- Types of Events
- Cost of Joining

## Part Three

The third part of the test is a conversation between you and the other candidate. One of the examiners describes a scenario and will give you prompts in the form of black and white pictures or written text to help you. You have to speak for about 2 minutes. The examiner will support the conversation as appropriate and then ask further questions related to the main theme.

**General training programme for new staff**

**Topics for training**

- Equipment
- Computer skills
- Company organisation
- Company rules
- Customer service
- Product training
- Health and safety
- Foreign languages

## Next steps

We wish you every success in taking BEC Preliminary and we hope that you will take other Cambridge ESOL exams in future. BEC Vantage is the next level of the BEC suite of business-oriented exams (see [www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/bec.htm](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/bec.htm)) or, if you prefer a general English qualification, you should consider First Certificate in English (FCE) as the next step. You can find out more information about FCE on our website at: [www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/fce.htm](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/fce.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**

At our school we prepare our students for BEC Preliminary because it is a realistic goal for a 3-year course. We encourage them to attend the BEC Vantage course on a voluntary basis. ... It is a good opportunity for them to get in addition an international language certificate during their commercial training.

**Margrit Walter-Wettstein, Berufsbildungszentrum Weinfelden, 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 full list of companies that use the BEC examinations for a variety of purposes including recruitment at:

[www.CambridgeESOL.org/recognition/search.php](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/recognition/search.php)

## [www.CambridgeESOL.org/BEC](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org/BEC)

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