

# *Reviewing FCE and CAE*

*Bulletin 8, August 2007*



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE  
ESOL Examinations

## General Update

Over the last two years, Cambridge ESOL has carried out a thorough review of the FCE and CAE examinations and will be introducing updated versions of these examinations from December 2008. The last two bulletins have focused on the Reading and the Writing papers, and the bulletin previous to these, Bulletin 5, contains an overview of the full FCE and CAE December 2008 Specifications. Bulletin 8 now follows with a detailed description of the Use of English papers, along with a rationale for the changes, and advice on preparing students for the exams. Future bulletins will focus on the Listening and Speaking papers.

Bulletins 5, 6 and 7 are available at:

[www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/fce.htm](http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/fce.htm) and [www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/cae.htm](http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/cae.htm)

## FCE Paper 3 Use of English (from December 2008)

- The paper contains 4 parts and there are 42 questions in total.
- Parts 1, 2 and 3 are text based.
- The time allowed is 45 minutes, including the time for candidates to transfer their answers to the separate answer sheet.

### PART 1 MULTIPLE-CHOICE CLOZE

Part 1 consists of a text containing twelve gaps. For each gap, four options are given. Candidates are required to draw on their lexical knowledge and understanding of the text in order to fill the gaps. Some questions test at a phrasal level, such as collocations and set phrases. Other questions test meaning at sentence level or beyond, with more processing of the text required. A lexico-grammatical element may be involved, such as when candidates have to choose the option which fits correctly with a following preposition or verb form.

### PART 2 OPEN CLOZE

Part 2 consists of a text containing twelve gaps. Candidates are required to draw on their knowledge of the structure of the language and understanding of the text in order to fill the gaps. The focus of the gapped words is either grammatical, such as articles, auxiliaries, prepositions, pronouns, verb tenses and forms; or lexico-grammatical, such as phrasal verbs, linkers and words within fixed phrases.

### PART 3 WORD FORMATION

Part 3 consists of a text containing ten gaps. Candidates need to form an appropriate word from a given stem word to fill each gap. The focus of this task is primarily lexical, though an understanding of structure is also required. It tests the candidates' knowledge of how prefixes, suffixes, internal changes and compounds are used in forming words. Candidates may be required to demonstrate understanding of the text beyond sentence level.

## **PART 4 KEY WORD TRANSFORMATIONS**

Part 4 consists of eight questions. Each question has a complete prompt sentence followed by a response sentence with a similar meaning, in which only the beginning and end of the sentence is given. Candidates have to complete the sentence with between 2 and 5 words, using a given key word which must not be changed in any way. The focus is both lexical and grammatical. The ability to express a message in different ways shows flexibility and resource in the use of language.

## **CAE Paper 3 Use of English (from December 2008)**

- The paper contains 5 parts and there are 50 questions in total.
- Parts 1, 2 and 3 are text based.
- The time allowed is 1 hour, including the time for candidates to transfer their answers to the separate answer sheet.

## **PART 1 MULTIPLE-CHOICE CLOZE**

Part 1 consists of a text containing twelve gaps. For each gap, four options are given. Candidates are required to draw on their lexical knowledge and understanding of the text in order to fill the gaps. Some questions test at a phrasal level, such as collocations and set phrases. Other questions test meaning at sentence level or beyond, with more processing of the text required. A lexico-grammatical element may be involved, such as when candidates have to choose the option which fits correctly with a following preposition or verb form.

## **PART 2 OPEN CLOZE**

Part 2 consists of a text with fifteen gaps. Candidates are required to draw on their knowledge of the structure of the language and understanding of the text in order to fill the gaps. The focus of the gapped words is either grammatical, such as articles, auxiliaries, prepositions, pronouns, verb tenses and forms; or lexico-grammatical, such as phrasal verbs, linkers and words within fixed phrases.

## **PART 3 WORD FORMATION**

Part 3 consists of a text containing ten gaps. Candidates need to form an appropriate word from a given stem word to fill each gap. The focus of this task is primarily lexical, though an understanding of structure is also required. It tests the candidates' knowledge of how prefixes, suffixes, internal changes and compounds are used in forming words. Candidates may be required to demonstrate understanding of the text beyond sentence level.

## **PART 4 GAPPED SENTENCES**

Part 4 consists of five questions and each question is made up of three discrete sentences. Each sentence contains one gap and the gapped word is common to all sentences. Candidates must write the one word which is appropriate in all three sentences. The focus of the task is lexical and aims to test candidates' knowledge of lexical patterns such as collocation, phrasal verbs and other word combinations. It tests whether candidates know items of vocabulary which have a range of meanings and which can be used in a variety of contexts.

## **PART 5 KEY WORD TRANSFORMATIONS**

Part 5 consists of eight questions. Each question has a complete prompt sentence followed by a response sentence with a similar meaning, in which only the beginning and end of the sentence is given. Candidates have to complete the sentence with between 3 and 6 words, using a given key word which must not be changed in any way. The focus is both lexical and grammatical. The ability to express a message in a different way shows flexibility and wide-ranging language resources.

## **Rationale for the format of the Use of English Papers**

The Use of English papers have been updated so that they are more streamlined. Time trialling has shown that the FCE and CAE Use of English papers can be completed in 45 minutes and 1 hour respectively. The papers continue to measure underlying language knowledge, that is, knowledge of the lexico-grammatical systems of English. They reflect an integrative view of lexis and grammar, treating the different aspects of the language knowledge system as overlapping and interrelated. The updated papers have a balance of text-based tasks and discrete items and give candidates the opportunity to display their control of many different features of English language usage. There is an increase in what candidates are required to produce as the tests progress, with the first part of the papers being receptive and the last part requiring the production of up to 5 or 6 words. To do well in the papers, candidates will need to show the ability to understand texts at phrase, sentence, paragraph and whole-text level and to manipulate language in a variety of ways.

The selection of tasks has been made on the basis of their capacity for covering as wide as possible a range of language points. Research into candidature taking FCE and CAE has shown that a significant number of candidates progress from FCE to CAE. The tasks selected for use in both Use of English papers therefore bear in mind the progression from one level to another, and make the papers more straightforward to prepare. The updated FCE and CAE papers contain four similar tasks, and the CAE paper has tasks in common with both FCE and CPE so that candidates and teachers can see the development from FCE and towards CPE more clearly. Differences in level between FCE and CAE have been maintained, not only by the increased number of parts, types of task and questions at CAE level, resulting in a longer test, but also by the fact that candidates have to respond to more complex or a wider range of test focuses during each task at CAE than at FCE.

## Multiple-Choice Cloze

This task has been retained in both FCE and CAE. Preparing candidates for this task is a good way of enlarging both passive and active vocabulary and of increasing sensitivity to precise shades of meaning and usage.

## Open Cloze

This task has been retained in both FCE and CAE. Preparing candidates for this task helps to increase their grammatical accuracy and sensitivity to precise usage as well as raise their awareness of discourse structure.

## Word Formation

The task has been retained, but with a revised layout for both FCE and CAE. In FCE, the gaps have been spread out throughout the text so that there is no longer one gap per line. This makes it easier to preserve the authentic text, and is more flexible in that a wider range of words is available for testing purposes. In the updated CAE paper, this task consists of one text only but the testing focus and level of difficulty remain unchanged. Preparing candidates for this task enables them to develop their range of vocabulary, increase lexical accuracy, focus on formation of negatives, plurals, adjectives, etc., develop sensitivity to precise usage, and improve spelling.

## Key Word Transformations

This is a task which is new to the CAE paper but retained in FCE. It is also found in CPE. It demonstrates candidates' awareness of parallel and synonymous expressions and the ability to control a range of structural and lexical patterns. Preparing candidates for this task promotes grammatical accuracy and lexical flexibility. This task has been made more demanding at CAE, in that candidates are required to provide up to 6 words and the task has a broader lexical and grammatical focus than at FCE.

## Gapped Sentences

This is a task which is new to the CAE paper. It is not a task in the FCE paper but is found at CPE. It tests knowledge of the multiple meanings of certain words in formal, informal and neutral use. Preparing candidates for this task is a good way of enlarging vocabulary and of increasing lexical precision and sensitivity to register and range of usage.

## Preparing for the Use of English Papers

Students need a thorough grounding in the grammatical system of English and a good knowledge of vocabulary, appropriate to the level. As well as studying these things overtly in particular 'language input' lessons in the classroom, students will benefit from an integrated course in which skills work plays an important part.

In particular, students need to read as much as possible to maximise exposure to a wide range of vocabulary in different contexts, and to acquire a feel for the grammar of the language, enabling them to see how structure and form can be manipulated accurately. They also need to be capable of some analysis of textual coherence and cohesion, as in the Use of English papers they need to be able to follow the line of argument in a text.

As with the existing papers, correct spelling is important in all parts of the papers. This too can be acquired through reading, and can be overtly focused on in the classroom.

When doing exam practice, students should be encouraged to read through the whole of the text so that they have a good idea of what it is about, before they begin to answer any questions. The presence of a title and a given example are designed to help them in this respect. Students should also check that their answers are correct in the context of the whole sentence, paragraph and text. Providing an answer which is correct only in the context of the immediate phrase is often not sufficient.

Practical exam-focused preparation should include practice in completing the answer sheet, and in use of clear handwriting. It should be noted that capital letters are required in completing the answer sheet in all parts with the exception of Part 1.

Here are some suggestions for activities which may be used in the classroom and for homework:

- Students complete vocabulary tasks which draw attention to collocation and knowledge of phrasal verbs, as well as those which focus on recognition of lexical appropriacy and shades of meaning.
- Students work on developing an efficient personal system of recording newly acquired vocabulary, recording whole phrases and collocations as well as individual words.
- Students should be made aware that knowing the contexts of words and phrases is as important as knowing their meaning.
- Students complete tasks which promote grammatical accuracy, especially those which focus on tense formation, the use of auxiliary and modal verbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, modifiers and determiners.
- Students practise paraphrasing, including rewriting sentences from texts and saying things again 'in other words'.
- Students practise doing transformation tasks in order to increase awareness of expressions with parallel or synonymous meanings, and develop flexibility in the use of language.
- Students work on the range of words which can be formed from the same base word.
- Students practise predicting the part of speech needed in Word Formation tasks.
- Students do activities such as dictation, which encourage correct spelling.

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