



# Syllabus

## Cambridge O Level English Language 1123

Use this syllabus for exams in 2023.

Exams are available in the June and November series.



### Changes to the syllabus for 2023

The latest syllabus is version 1, published September 2020.

There are no significant changes which affect teaching.

**You are strongly advised to read the whole syllabus before planning your teaching programme.**

**Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2018 are still suitable for use with this syllabus.**

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Why choose Cambridge International?

Cambridge International prepares school students for life, helping them develop an informed curiosity and a lasting passion for learning. We are part of the University of Cambridge.

Our Cambridge Pathway gives students a clear path for educational success from age 5 to 19. Schools can shape the curriculum around how they want students to learn – with a wide range of subjects and flexible ways to offer them. It helps students discover new abilities and a wider world, and gives them the skills they need for life, so they can achieve at school, university and work.

Our programmes and qualifications set the global standard for international education. They are created by subject experts, rooted in academic rigour and reflect the latest educational research. They provide a strong platform for students to progress from one stage to the next, and are well supported by teaching and learning resources.

Every year, nearly a million Cambridge learners from 10000 schools in 160 countries prepare for their future with the Cambridge Pathway.

### Cambridge learners

Our mission is to provide educational benefit through provision of international programmes and qualifications for school education and to be the world leader in this field. Together with schools, we develop Cambridge learners who are:

- **confident** in working with information and ideas – their own and those of others
- **responsible** for themselves, responsive to and respectful of others
- **reflective** as learners, developing their ability to learn
- **innovative** and equipped for new and future challenges
- **engaged** intellectually and socially, ready to make a difference.

### Recognition

Our expertise in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment is the basis for the recognition of our programmes and qualifications around the world.

Cambridge O Level is internationally recognised by schools, universities and employers as equivalent in demand to Cambridge IGCSE™ (International General Certificate of Secondary Education). There are over 600000 entries a year in over 50 countries. Learn more at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition)



Cambridge Assessment International Education is an education organisation and politically neutral. The contents of this syllabus, examination papers and associated materials do not endorse any political view. We endeavour to treat all aspects of the exam process neutrally.

## Support for teachers

A wide range of materials and resources is available to support teachers and learners in Cambridge schools. Resources suit a variety of teaching methods in different international contexts. Through subject discussion forums and training, teachers can access the expert advice they need for teaching our qualifications. More details can be found in Section 2 of this syllabus and at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/teachers](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/teachers)

## Support for exams officers

Exams officers can trust in reliable, efficient administration of exams entries and excellent personal support from our customer services. Learn more at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

## Quality management

Cambridge International is committed to providing exceptional quality. In line with this commitment, our quality management system for the provision of international qualifications and education programmes for students aged 5 to 19 is independently certified as meeting the internationally recognised standard, ISO 9001:2015. Learn more at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/ISO9001](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/ISO9001)

## 1.2 Why choose Cambridge O Level?

Cambridge O Level is typically for 14 to 16 year olds and is an internationally recognised qualification. It has been designed especially for an international market and is sensitive to the needs of different countries. Cambridge O Level is designed for learners whose first language may not be English, and this is acknowledged throughout the examination process.

Our aim is to balance knowledge, understanding and skills in our programmes and qualifications to enable students to become effective learners and to provide a solid foundation for their continuing educational journey.

Through our professional development courses and our support materials for Cambridge O Levels, we provide the tools to enable teachers to prepare students to the best of their ability and work with us in the pursuit of excellence in education.

Cambridge O Levels are considered to be an excellent preparation for Cambridge International AS & A Levels, the Cambridge AICE (Advanced International Certificate of Education) Diploma, Cambridge Pre-U, and other education programmes, such as the US Advanced Placement program and the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme. Learn more about Cambridge O Levels at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/olevel](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/olevel)

## Guided learning hours

Cambridge O Level syllabuses are designed on the assumption that learners have about 130 guided learning hours per subject over the duration of the course, but this is for guidance only. The number of hours required to gain the qualification may vary according to local curricular practice and the students' prior experience of the subject.

## 1.3 Why choose Cambridge O Level English Language?

Cambridge O Levels are established qualifications that keep pace with educational developments and trends. The Cambridge O Level curriculum places emphasis on broad and balanced study across a wide range of subject areas. The curriculum is structured so that students attain both practical skills and theoretical knowledge.

Cambridge O Level English Language is accepted by universities and employers as proof of linguistic ability and understanding. The Cambridge O Level English Language syllabus encourages students to develop lifelong skills, including:

- the ability to communicate clearly, accurately and effectively
- the use of a wide range of vocabulary and correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- a personal style and an awareness of the audience being addressed.

Students are also encouraged to read widely, both for their own enjoyment and to further their awareness of the ways in which English can be used. Cambridge O Level English Language study also develops more general analysis and communication skills such as synthesis, inference, and the ability to order facts and present opinions effectively.

Students may also study for a Cambridge O Level in Literature in English. In addition to Cambridge O Levels, Cambridge also offers Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge International AS and A Levels for further study in English as well as other languages. See [www.cambridgeinternational.org](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org) for a full list of the qualifications you can take.

### Prior learning

We recommend that candidates who are beginning this course should have sufficient competence in English to be able to achieve a level of English equivalent to First Language competence during the course.

### Progression

Cambridge O Levels are general qualifications that enable candidates to progress either directly to employment, or to proceed to further qualifications.

Candidates who are awarded grades A\* to C in Cambridge O Level English Language are well prepared to follow courses leading to Cambridge International AS and A Level English Language, or the equivalent.

## 1.4 How can I find out more?

### If you are already a Cambridge school

You can make entries for this qualification through your usual channels. If you have any questions, please contact us at [info@cambridgeinternational.org](mailto:info@cambridgeinternational.org)

### If you are not yet a Cambridge school

Learn about the benefits of becoming a Cambridge school at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/startcambridge](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/startcambridge)  
Email us at [info@cambridgeinternational.org](mailto:info@cambridgeinternational.org) to find out how your organisation can register to become a Cambridge school.

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## 2. Teacher support

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### 2.1 Support materials

You can go to our public website at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/olevel](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/olevel) to download current and future syllabuses together with specimen papers or past question papers, examiner reports and grade threshold tables from one series.

For teachers at registered Cambridge schools a range of additional support materials for specific syllabuses is available online from the School Support Hub. Go to [www.cambridgeinternational.org/support](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support) (username and password required). If you do not have access, speak to the School Support coordinator at your school.

### 2.2 Endorsed resources

We work with publishers who provide a range of resources for our syllabuses including print and digital materials. Resources endorsed by Cambridge International go through a detailed quality assurance process to make sure they provide a high level of support for teachers and learners.

You can find resources to support this syllabus by clicking the Published resources link on the syllabus page [www.cambridgeinternational.org/1123](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/1123)

### 2.3 Training

We offer a range of support activities for teachers to ensure they have the relevant knowledge and skills to deliver our qualifications. See [www.cambridgeinternational.org/events](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/events) for further information.

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### 3. Syllabus content at a glance

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Cambridge O Level English Language offers candidates the opportunity to respond confidently to a range of reading material, including fiction and non-fiction.

Candidates will also have the opportunity to enhance their writing skills by writing in a range of text types for different audiences.

Candidates are encouraged to become appreciative and critical readers and writers.



## 4. Assessment at a glance

Candidates for Cambridge O Level English Language must take two compulsory components – Paper 1 and Paper 2. Both papers are externally marked. Candidates will be eligible for grades A\* to E.

Component	Weighting
<p><b>Paper 1 Writing</b> <b>1 hour 30 minutes</b></p> <p>Candidates answer <b>two</b> questions: the compulsory question in Section 1 and one question from Section 2.</p> <p><b>Section 1: Directed Writing (30 marks)</b></p> <p>Candidates are presented with one compulsory writing task. Candidates write a response of 200–300 words.</p> <p><b>Section 2: Composition (30 marks)</b></p> <p>Candidates complete one writing task from a choice of five descriptive/argumentative/narrative essay titles. Candidates write a response of 350–500 words.</p> <p>This component is externally assessed.</p> <p>60 marks</p>	50%
<p><b>Paper 2 Reading</b> <b>1 hour 45 minutes</b></p> <p>Candidates answer all questions in both sections.</p> <p><b>Section 1: Reading for Ideas (25 marks)</b></p> <p>Candidates scan a factual text and identify key points.</p> <p>Candidates use their notes to produce a written summary of 150–180 words.</p> <p>Candidates answer questions to identify examples of a function in the text, e.g. opinions, advice, criticism or warnings.</p> <p><b>Section 2: Reading for Meaning (25 marks)</b></p> <p>Candidates respond to questions about one narrative passage.</p> <p>Both passages in Paper 2 will be approximately 700 words each.</p> <p>This component is externally assessed.</p> <p>50 marks</p>	50%

### Availability

This syllabus is examined in the June and November examination series.

This syllabus is available to private candidates.

Detailed timetables are available from [www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables)

Cambridge O Levels are available to centres in administrative zones 3, 4 and 5.

## Combining this with other syllabuses

Candidates can combine this syllabus in an examination series with any other Cambridge syllabus, except:

- syllabuses with the same title at the same level
- 0500 Cambridge IGCSE First Language English
- 0510 Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language
- 0511 Cambridge IGCSE English as a Second Language (count-in oral)
- 0522 Cambridge International Level 1/Level 2 Certificate First Language English
- 0627 Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) First Language English
- 1119 Cambridge O Level English Language (Malaysia)
- 1120 Cambridge O Level English Language (Brunei)
- 1125 Cambridge O Level English Language (Mauritius)
- 1126 Cambridge O Level English Language Syllabus B (Mauritius)
- 1128 Cambridge O Level English Language (Singapore)

Candidates for Cambridge O Level English Language **MUST** enter as follows:

- Candidates in **Brunei** *must* enter for **Subject 1120**
- Candidates in **Mauritius** *must* enter for **Subject 1125** or **1126**
- Candidates in **Singapore** *must* enter for **Subject 1128**
- Candidates elsewhere (including previous subject 1115) *must* enter for **Subject 1123**.

No candidate may enter for more than one English Language subject.

Please note that Cambridge O Level, Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) (syllabuses are at the same level.

## 5. Syllabus aims and assessment objectives

### 5.1 Syllabus aims

The syllabus aims are set out below and describe the educational purposes of a course in O Level English Language. They are not listed in order of priority.

A qualification in this syllabus demonstrates to universities and employers that candidates can communicate effectively in Standard English through:

- **communicative competence:** the ability to communicate with clarity, relevance, accuracy and variety
- **creativity:** the ability to use language, experience and imagination to respond to new situations, create original ideas and make a positive impact
- **critical skills:** the ability to scan, filter and analyse different forms of information
- **cross-cultural awareness:** the ability to engage with issues inside and outside own community, dealing with the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. (This is not an assessment objective but forms the context of writing tasks and reading passages.)

	Writing to:	Reading to:
Communicative competence	communicate precisely and appropriately	understand exact and implied meaning
Creativity	develop ideas effectively	
Critical skills		identify and respond to main ideas
Cross-cultural awareness	reflect on the familiar	have strategies to deal with the unfamiliar

### 5.2 Assessment objectives

#### AO1: Reading

- R1 Demonstrate understanding of explicit meanings
- R2 Demonstrate understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes
- R3 Analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions
- R4 Demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve effects
- R5 Select for specific purposes

#### AO2: Writing

- W1 Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined
- W2 Sequence facts, ideas and opinions
- W3 Use a range of appropriate vocabulary
- W4 Use register appropriate to audience and context
- W5 Make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar

### 5.3 Relationship between assessment objectives and components

The approximate weightings allocated to each of the assessment objectives (AOs) are summarised below.

The table shows the assessment objectives as a percentage of each component and across the qualification as a whole.

Component	AO1 %	AO2 %
<b>Paper 1 Writing</b>	5	45
<b>Paper 2 Reading</b>	45	5
<b>Weighting of AO in qualification</b>	50	50

## 6. Syllabus content

Reflecting the communication demands facing candidates in the real world, the syllabus distinguishes between **task** and **language** as the focus of Section 1 and Section 2 respectively in each paper:

Section	Focus	Writing	Reading
1	Task	Directed Writing	Reading for Ideas
2	Language	Composition	Reading for Meaning

The **Task** aspect of Paper 1 is **Directed Writing**, where communication of key information in a range of text types is required to achieve a specific purpose for a certain audience in a particular situation. Task fulfilment and language are tested in Section 1 and are given equal weighting in terms of marks. **Language** (as well as content) is tested in the **Composition** section, where candidates have an opportunity to display their English language skills in order to express their opinion, experience or imagination in a range of discourse types: descriptive, argumentative or narrative.

The **Task** aspect of Paper 2 is **Reading for Ideas**, where, for example, scanning for and summarising specific information is required to achieve and convey a global understanding of a text. The focus of assessment for the summary is Task Fulfilment: the inclusion of only relevant ideas and the coherence of the writing. **Language** is tested in the **Reading for Meaning** section, where there is a greater demand for English language skills in order to demonstrate more in-depth understanding of a text, including literal and implied meaning, deducing meaning of vocabulary from context, and writer's craft.

In this way, it is hoped that candidates will develop strategies to be able to transfer these communication skills to other subjects and to their future careers/studies as they encounter a variety of texts and are required to make a positive impact through the written word.

**Speaking and listening are not tested but the development of these vital communication skills is encouraged across the curriculum.**

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## 7. Description of components

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### 7.1 Paper 1 Writing

**1 hour 30 minutes, 60 marks – external assessment, 50 per cent of qualification**

This paper has two sections and candidates **answer in a separate answer booklet**.

#### Section 1: Directed Writing (30 marks)

- Candidates are presented with **one task**, e.g. write a letter, speech, report, article, which is fit for purpose and relevant to the world of study, work or the community.
- Candidates should write 200–300 words to inform or persuade a particular audience.
- A total of 15 marks are allocated for task fulfilment and 15 marks for language.

Section 1 tests the following assessment objectives:

R1 Demonstrate understanding of explicit meanings

R2 Demonstrate understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes

W1 Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined

W2 Sequence facts, ideas and opinions

W3 Use a range of appropriate vocabulary

W4 Use register appropriate to audience and context

W5 Make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

#### Section 2: Composition (30 marks)

- This is an essay, testing language and content combined.
- Candidates answer **one** question from a choice of five essay titles. Candidates will be presented with 1 descriptive, 2 argumentative and 2 narrative essay titles from which to choose.
- Candidates are advised to write a response of between 350 and 500 words.

Section 2 tests the following assessment objectives:

W1 Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined

W2 Sequence facts, ideas and opinions

W3 Use a range of appropriate vocabulary

W4 Use register appropriate to audience and context

W5 Make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## 7.2 Paper 2 Reading

**1 hour 45 minutes, 50 marks – external assessment, 50 per cent of qualification**

This paper has two sections and candidates **answer on the question paper**.

### Section 1: Reading for Ideas (25 marks)

- Candidates scan a **factual** text (or texts) of approximately 700 words, e.g. report(s), article(s), advertisement(s), email(s), letter(s).
- Candidates **identify and note down required information**, e.g. similarities and differences, or causes and effects, or advantages and disadvantages, or problems and solutions, or actions and consequences.

Example content points will be given as guidance to candidates.

- A total of 12 marks are allocated for content points.
- Candidates use their notes to **write a summary** of between 150 and 180 words.
- A total of 10 marks are allocated for the summary based on relevance and coherence.

This task tests the following assessment objectives:

R5 Select for specific purposes

W2 Sequence facts, ideas and opinions

W3 Use a range of appropriate vocabulary.

- Candidates then answer questions to identify examples of a function in the text, e.g. opinions, advice, criticism or warnings.
- These will be **short answer** questions worth 3 marks.

These tasks test the following assessment objective:

R3 Analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions.

### Section 2: Reading for Meaning (25 marks)

- Candidates read a **narrative** passage (e.g. report, article, story) of approximately 700 words.
- Candidates respond to **short answer** and **multiple choice questions** testing their ability to understand the language (both explicit and implicit meanings).

Section 2 tests the following assessment objectives:

R1 Demonstrate understanding of explicit meanings

R2 Demonstrate understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes

R3 Analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions

R4 Demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve effects.

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## 8. Other information

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### Equality and inclusion

We have taken great care in the preparation of this syllabus and assessment materials to avoid bias of any kind. In our effort to comply with the UK Equality Act (2010), we have taken all reasonable steps to avoid direct and indirect discrimination.

The standard assessment arrangements may present barriers for candidates with impairments. Where a candidate is eligible, we may be able to make arrangements to enable that candidate to access assessments and receive recognition of their attainment. We do not agree access arrangements if they give candidates an unfair advantage over others or if they compromise the standards being assessed.

Candidates who are unable to access the assessment of any component may be eligible to receive an award based on the parts of the assessment they have taken.

Information on access arrangements is in the *Cambridge Handbook* at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

### Language

This syllabus and the associated assessment materials are available in English only.

### Making entries

Exams officers are responsible for submitting entries to Cambridge International. We encourage them to work closely with you to make sure they enter the right number of candidates for the right combination of syllabus components. Entry option codes and instructions for submitting entries are in the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*. Your exams officer has a copy of this guide.

### Exam administration

To keep our exams secure, we produce question papers for different areas of the world, known as 'administrative zones'. We allocate all Cambridge schools to one administrative zone determined by their location. Each zone has a specific timetable. Some of our syllabuses offer candidates different assessment options. An entry option code is used to identify the components the candidate will take relevant to the administrative zone and the available assessment options.

### Retakes

Candidates can retake the whole qualification as many times as they want to. This is a linear qualification so candidates cannot re-sit individual components.

### Grading and reporting

Cambridge O Level results are shown by one of the grades A\*, A, B, C, D or E, indicating the standard achieved, A\* being the highest and E the lowest. 'Ungraded' indicates that the candidate's performance fell short of the standard required for grade E. 'Ungraded' will be reported on the statement of results but not on the certificate. The letters Q (pending) and X (no result) may also appear on the statement of results but not on the certificate.



## How students and teachers can use the grades

Assessment at Cambridge O Level has two purposes:

- to measure learning and achievement

The assessment:

- confirms achievement and performance in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the syllabus, to the levels described in the grade descriptions.

- to show likely future success

The outcomes:

- help predict which students are well prepared for a particular course or career and/or which students are more likely to be successful
- help students choose the most suitable course or career.

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