



# **Oxford ELLT**

# **Academic Content**

# **Changes**

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# Academic Content Changes

Language tests rarely stay still for long. As teaching, technology, and student needs evolve, so must the ways we measure language ability. The Oxford English Language Level Test (ELLT) is one such example: a relatively new assessment that has grown quickly in both scale and recognition, while continuing to adapt to changing academic and global contexts. This is an overview of the ELLT structure and content revisions based on the findings from a series of initiatives including ongoing research into English language testing for Higher Education, competitor analysis, and an external review of the Oxford ELLT.

**Fulcher (2010) argues that language tests should be grounded in evidence about target language use domains in order to ensure validity and relevance.** Thus, these changes are informed by academic research as well as feedback from our university partners.

The updates are not radical; they build on established assessment principles. **Bachman and Palmer (1996) emphasise that test usefulness depends on balancing innovation with consistency and comparability, ensuring continuity for stakeholders.** The changes focus primarily on introducing a wider range of task types and incorporating some integrated-skills elements. Together, these refinements aim to better reflect the language demands students face at university, without altering the overall purpose or standard of the test.

The same changes will be implemented across both the ELLT Digital and ELLT Global versions of the Oxford ELLT.

This document is a skill-by-skill summary comparing the current exam format (on the left) with the proposed updates (on the right).

## Reading

The key change to the reading component is the introduction of three texts of varying lengths, rather than two texts of similar length. This approach allows us to incorporate a wider range of task types and assess reading subskills in a more nuanced and comprehensive way. **Grabe (2009) highlights that skilled reading involves multiple interacting processes, including comprehension, inference, and discourse structuring, supporting the inclusion of varied task types.**

	Current	New
Time	40 minutes	40 minutes
No. of texts	2	3
No. of questions / points	16 per text; 32 total	Questions: 6+8+16; 30 Points: 6+8+18; 32  The reading test contains 30 items. Twenty-eight questions are worth 1 point each, and 2 CEFR C-level inference questions are worth 2 points each, for a total of 32 points.
Length per text	Text 1 – 400 – 600 words Text 2 – 400 – 600 words	Text 1 – about 200 words Text 2 – about 400 words Text 3 – 500 – 600 words
Level & Task type (s)	Text 1 – B1; multiple choice comprehension questions Text 2 – B2/C1 multiple choice comprehension questions	Text 1 – B1/B1+; paragraph sequencing Text 2 – B2; gap-fill text completion at a phrase level Text 3 – C1 multiple choice comprehension questions
Question complexity	A2 – C1 in all text	A2 – C1 in all texts

Across the three tasks, the Reading Module aims to assess the following reading skills and subskills; please note these are representative examples, not a complete list:

- Recognition of cohesive devices and discourse markers; referencing and pronoun use
- Ability to identify introductory and concluding ideas, arguments and explanations
- Identification of main ideas and supporting detail
- Understanding of specific factual information
- Vocabulary in context
- Recognition of implied meaning and inference
- Distinction between stated and non-stated information
- Interpretation of author viewpoint or attitude

## Listening

The number of listening tracks remains unchanged, and most task types are retained. However, the second listening task will now require test takers to complete notes based on the listening input. This change places greater emphasis on listening for detail and specific information and better reflects real-life academic contexts faced by prospective university students. Flowerdew (1994) notes that academic listening places significant demands on students' ability to process and record information in real time.

	Current	New
Time	25 minutes	25 minutes
No. of listening tracks	3	3
No. of questions / points	8 per text/audio; 32 total	8 per text/audio; 32 total
Type of listening input	A monologue (played once) A dialogue (played twice) Listening analysis – multiple short speakers (played twice)	A monologue (played once) A monologue or dialogue (played twice) Listening analysis – multiple short speakers (played twice)
Level & Task type (s)	B2 - multiple choice listening comprehension C1 - multiple choice listening comprehension Mixed level – speaker / topic identification	B1/2 – multiple choice listening comprehension questions C1 – note completion (word or phrase level) Mixed level – speaker / item identification
Question complexity	A2 – C1 in all text	A2 – C1 in all texts

The Listening Module is designed to evaluate the following skills and subskills, once again these are illustrative rather than exhaustive:

Ability to follow extended spoken discourse

- Recognition of key points and supporting information
- Interpretation of speaker purpose and tone
- Ability to comprehend and distinguish between gist, key detail, and specific information
- Ability to transfer information accurately
- Understanding of viewpoint and stance
- Ability to distinguish between similar opinions

## Writing

In response to feedback from partners and broader industry trends, we are introducing two writing tasks instead of one.

The first is an integrated task that asks test takers to briefly summarise a short reading passage in writing, emphasising practical, real-life study skills. Weigle (2004) suggests that integrated writing tasks more closely reflect the kinds of academic writing required in university settings.

The second writing task remains an essay-style response based on a prompt. Hyland (2003) emphasises that academic writing plays a central role in students' ability to participate in disciplinary communities, reinforcing the continued importance of extended writing tasks.

	<b>Current</b>	<b>New</b>
Time	45 minutes	50 minutes
No. of writing tasks	1	2
Task type	Essay-style writing based on a prompt	Task 1 – A short text (170-200 words) written summary Task 2 – Essay-style writing based on a prompt
Text length	190 – 260 words	Task 1 – 80 – 100 words Task 2 – 190 – 250 words
Assessment approach	Assessed by live, standardised examiner using assessment rubrics	Assessed by live, standardised examiner using assessment rubrics

These two tasks are not equally weighted; task one is assessed with a global mark which carries 30% of the overall grade. Task two is assessed using writing rubrics and carries 70% of the overall grade for the writing component.

The key areas assessed by the writing tasks are as follows:

- Paraphrasing & expression of ideas
- Clarity and coherence
- Ability to present and /or evaluate arguments in writing
- Organisation and paragraph structure
- Range and control of vocabulary
- Grammatical accuracy and complexity
- Use of examples to support reasoning

## Speaking

The main change to the speaking test is the removal of the unproctored 15-minute preparation period. As a result, test takers will no longer be required to deliver a prepared presentation on an assigned topic. Instead, they will respond to prompts of increasing linguistic complexity, delivering a short monologue after a brief thinking period.

This change is intended to better assess spontaneous language use, placing greater emphasis on genuine communication rather than rehearsed performance. Luoma (2004) argues that speaking assessments should prioritise tasks that elicit spontaneous and interactive communication.

	Current	New
Time	Approx. 20-25 mins	Approx. 20-25 mins
Task 1	Unassessed personal Q&A + identity & security check	Unassessed personal Q&A + identity & security check
Task 2	3-5-minute student led presentation on assigned topic (plus 15-minute preparation time prior to the speaking test)	A student-led monologue based on up to three prompts (factual, comparative, and hypothetical). Students have 45 seconds to review the written topic and approximately 2-3 minutes to respond to the examiner's prompts.
Task 3	5-7-minute examiner led Q&A based on ELLT writing	5-7-minute examiner led Q&A based on ELLT writing
Task 4	5-7-minute examiner led discussion based on a visual prompt	5-7-minute examiner led discussion based on a visual prompt

Tasks 2, 3 and 4 are equally weighted; while tasks 2 and 3 are assessed using speaking rubrics, part 3 allows the examiner to move the prompts up and / or down the levels and is therefore awarded a global mark.

This module assesses:

- Ability to develop extended spoken responses
- Organisation and clarity of ideas
- Spontaneous language production
- Ability to justify and clarify viewpoints
- Interactive communication skills
- Ability to respond flexibly to follow-up questions
- Fluency and coherence in real-time discussion
- Pronunciation

## Summary

Overall, these updates maintain the core structure and purpose of the Oxford ELLT while enhancing its alignment with real-world academic language use. By incorporating a broader range of task types and integrating skills across components, the test more accurately reflects the demands placed on students in higher education contexts.

## References

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