

English – Epreuve Commune

General SPECIFICATIONS – 19/04/2013

The following specifications contain information for teachers and can be presented and explained to test-takers.

OVERALL DESIGN

Test-purpose & Intended decisions

The English “Epreuve Commune” Test consists of three papers (Reading, Listening and Writing) which form a test of General English at A2/B1 level.

One main purpose of the paper is to establish whether the test-takers have reached a level similar to the A2 level as outlined both in the CEFR and the national syllabi.

However, the test results should also reflect how convincingly this has been done, i.e. the attainment of ‘A2’ will essentially mark the cut-off point between ‘pass’ and ‘fail’. Furthermore, within the framework of the 60-mark scheme, the test results will make more nuanced gradations of quality possible; they should reflect whether the candidate failed to reach A2, “only just” reached it, did so comfortably or even showed signs of exceeding this basic level.

Even though some items will exceed A2 levels, no general inferences about students’ potential B1-level proficiency can be drawn.

Target population

The test-takers are Luxembourg school pupils in ‘Enseignement Secondaire’ (ES 6e Moderne & 5e Classique) and ‘Enseignement Secondaire Technique’ (EST 9eTE). Due to a different distribution of lessons per week and a different rhythm of progression, EST pupils will take the test within their second year of English language instruction while ES pupils will already take it at the end of their first year. By the time they sit the test towards the end of the school year, 9eTE students will, on average, have had about 240 lessons in English¹, while 6eM students will have had about 180² lessons.

The majority of test takers will be aged between 13 and 15.

L1 varies a great deal as the population of Luxembourg consists of over 40% non-native Luxembourgers and this figure is constantly increasing.

Target level

As the basic difficulty level of the test has been designed to correspond to the descriptors of language performance at the A2 level of the CEFR, the majority of items will target A2 level. However, a number of items targeting a higher level of performance will also be included (A2+/B1).

Time

Listening: 30 minutes
Reading: 30 minutes
Writing: 40 minutes
Overall: 100 minutes

¹ At least 5 full terms consisting of periods of +/- 12 weeks each with 4 lessons a week (=5*12*4=240 lessons). One lesson equals 45 – 50 minutes.

² At least 2.5 terms consisting of periods of +/-12 weeks each with 6 lessons a week (2.5*12*6 = 180 lessons)

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Text topics

The possible topics of the input texts are those listed in the 6ème moderne / 5ème classique syllabus (pp.14-17): personal identification, home and local environment, daily life, free time, entertainment, food and drink, relations with other people, work, shopping, measures and shapes, travel, education, language, health and body care, services, places and locations, weather, science and technology (in regard to objects and devices closely connected to the students' everyday life, e.g. mobile phones, Internet...), society, media.

The topics are adapted to the test takers' age range.

Topics potentially causing offence or emotional distress have been avoided: religion, politics, problems within the family and sexual behaviour, disasters ...

A variety of topics are covered across the different tasks of the test.

LISTENING PAPER

Test construct	<p>The test construct is based on the national syllabi for 6eM and 9eTE, which in turn are primarily based on existing CEFR A2 (and two B1) level descriptors. These descriptors suggest that students³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.• Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.• Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her, when it is conducted slowly and clearly.• Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.• Can understand simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.• Can understand and extract the essential information from short, recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters which are delivered slowly and clearly.• Can use an idea of the overall meaning of short [...] utterances on everyday topics of a concrete type to derive the probable meaning of unknown words from the context.• Can understand the main points of clear, standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc.• Can understand numbers, prices and times. <p>Furthermore, some test tasks and items may also draw upon the following CEFR B1-level descriptors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday...topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent.• Can understand the main points of [<i>simple</i>] radio news bulletins and simpler recorded material about familiar subjects delivered relatively slowly and clearly.
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Input texts	<p>The input texts are not known to the test-takers.</p> <p>The speech rate is adapted to the A2 level.</p> <p>While the spoken texts are supposed to be generally within the learners' range, unfamiliar or more complex words and structures may occur; however, test</p>
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³ Overall, this list of Can-do statements is taken from CEFR A2 descriptor tables (Council of Europe: 2001) and from the national syllabi for 6eM and 9eTE.

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items do not focus on these more complex constructions.

Whether a text and its corresponding tasks/items are suitable was decided by an item moderation team and checked through trialling.

The possible genres include everyday social interactions (face-to-face, on the phone...), mediated communication (radio, answering machines or oral instructions) and more formal or [school-related] communication (presentations, speeches, announcements...).

The recordings may contain appropriate (even supportive) background noise.

Possible text types include:

- messages and announcements;
- simple directions;
- factual news items or reports;
- dialogues and monologues of varying lengths.

Speaker characteristics

Different ages and genders.

Particular native and non-native accents are only very mild.

Length of input texts and distribution of items

The impact of memory must be reduced to a minimum. Extensive memorization abilities are not part of the construct that the test intends to measure.

All items can only be answered by direct reference to the spoken texts. Items that are based on or could be answered through general knowledge have been avoided.

The spoken texts and the questions are designed in such a way that the students can answer the questions as they listen; however candidates are given time to study the items before the actual recordings start and, depending on the task, complete their answers after listening.

In each task, the items are evenly distributed across the entire input text. They also follow the chronological order in which the relevant information appears in the recording.

Number of tasks and items & test methods used

The test contains a total number of 30 items which are distributed across 4 different tasks:

For a more detailed and synoptic description of individual tasks, items and test methods see table at the end of this document.

A minimum of 3 different test methods are used in the listening test in order to reduce test method effects. To prevent excessive “teaching to the test”, the applied test methods for each test focus may vary from version to version/year to year.

Weighting of items

All items of the tasks are equally weighted.

Instructions and rubrics

The rubrics are both recorded and provided in the target language. They are standard rubrics that have been trialled. Moreover, at the beginning of every

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	task, the test-takers are given an example to illustrate what they are supposed to do.
Response format	<p>In selected response tasks, test-takers will tick/cross/circle their chosen answers in the corresponding boxes provided with the items on the test paper.</p> <p>In limited production tasks, responding to items does not require test-takers to write longer samples of language. Students should be able to answer each short-answer item by using a maximum of three words.</p>
Scoring	Spelling mistakes will not be penalised as long as the meaning of the word/s remain/s clear. Similarly, grammar mistakes will not be penalised as long as the meaning of the produced answer is deemed comprehensible. A comprehensive answer key will provide assessors with detailed lists of acceptable answers per item.

READING

The test construct is based on the national syllabi for 6eM and 9eTE, which in turn are primarily based on existing CEFR A2 level descriptors. These descriptors suggest that students⁴

Test construct

- Can understand straightforward information within a known area.
- Can understand straightforward information on food, standard menus, road signs and messages.
- Can locate specific information in lists and isolate the information required.
- Can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, reference lists and timetables.
- Can understand everyday signs and notices: in public places, such as streets, restaurants, railway stations; in workplaces, such as directions, instructions, hazard warnings.
- Can understand short reports or manuals of a predictable nature within his/her own area of expertise.
- Can identify specific information in simpler written material such as letters, brochures and short newspaper articles describing events.
- Can understand short, simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consist of high frequency everyday or school-related⁵ language.
- Can understand basic types of standard routine letters, faxes and e-mails (enquiries, orders, letters of confirmation etc.) on familiar topics.
- Can understand the general meaning of a simplified article.
- Can use an idea of the overall meaning of short texts [...] on everyday topics of a concrete type to derive the probable meaning of unknown words from the context.

The input texts are not known to the test takers.

Input texts

The input texts are **semi-authentic**: authentic target language texts (and their intended purpose) from magazines, the Internet, brochures, etc. will provide the inspiration for any texts used in the test.

While the texts are supposed to be generally within the learners' range, unfamiliar or more complex words and structures may occur; however, test items do not focus on these more complex constructions.

Whether a text and its corresponding task are suitable was decided by an item

⁴ This list of Can-do statements is taken from CEFR A2 descriptor tables (Council of Europe: 2001) and from the national syllabi for 6eM and 9eTE.

⁵ While the initial CEFR descriptor mentioned 'job-related' language rather than 'school-related' language, the students' age and immediate needs warrant this slight alteration. That being said, 'job-related' language may already be developed and thus tested to some extent at this level as well.

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moderation team and checked through trialling.

Text types include short simple articles, letters, descriptions, e-mails, advertisements, prospectuses and brochures, timetables, menus, signs and notices, manuals, and instructions.

In order to increase authenticity, texts are presented in a format resembling the original text type as closely as possible.

The reading test presents test takers with a selection of different types and genres of input texts that sample a variety of topics.

Length of input texts and distribution of items

The input texts will vary in length from very short notices, instructions, signs, etc. to texts of a maximum of 220 words.

All items can only be answered by direct reference to the texts. Items that are based on or could be answered through general knowledge have been avoided.

In each task, the items are evenly distributed across the entire text. They follow the chronological order in which the relevant information appears in the text.

The test will contain texts of different types, lengths, topics and foci.

Number of tasks and items & test methods used

The test contains a total number of 30 items which are distributed across 4 different tasks:

For a more detailed and synoptic description of individual tasks, items and test methods see table at the end of this document.

A minimum of 3 different test methods are used in the listening test in order to reduce test method effects. To prevent excessive “teaching to the test”, the applied test methods for each test focus may vary from version to version/year to year.

Weighting of items

All items of the tasks at the intended level are equally weighted.

Instructions and rubrics

The rubrics are provided in the target language. They are standard rubrics which have been trialled. Moreover, at the beginning of every task, the test-takers are given an example to illustrate what they are supposed to do.

Response format

In selected response tasks, test-takers will tick/cross/circle their chosen answers in the corresponding boxes provided with the items on the test paper.

In limited production tasks, responding to items does not require test-takers to write longer samples of language. Students should be able to answer each short-answer item by using a maximum of three words.

Scoring

Spelling mistakes will not be penalised as long as the meaning of the word/s remain/s clear. Similarly, grammar mistakes will not be penalised as long as the meaning of the produced answer is deemed comprehensible. A comprehensive answer key will provide assessors with detailed lists of acceptable answers per item.

WRITING

The test construct is based on the national syllabi for 6eM and 9eTE, which in turn are based on existing CEFR A2/B1 (and some A1) level descriptors. These descriptors suggest that students⁶

- Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences. (A1)
- Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.
- Can write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live and what they do. (A1)
- Can write about everyday aspects of his/her environment, e.g. people, places, a job or study experience in linked sentences.
- Can write very short basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences.
- Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences about their family, living conditions and educational background, present or most recent job.
- Can write short, simple imaginary biographies [...] about people.

Test construct

Furthermore, to verify whether students have already exceeded the basic A2 level, the test tasks may also draw upon the following CEFR B1-level descriptors:

- Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.
- Can write straightforward, detailed descriptions on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest.
- Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text.
- Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined.
- Can narrate a story.

One shorter task and one longer task

Task number and types

Short (interactive/correspondence) writing task: note, postcard, short e-mail, written in response to a prompt text (pupils are told who to write to [register] and what to write [format]). Length: +80 words.

Long (productive) writing task: short narrative, story writing. Length: 120-150 words.

⁶ Overall, this list of Can-do statements contains extracts from CEFR A2 descriptor tables (Council of Europe: 2001) and from the national syllabi for 6eM and 9eTE.

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Instructions and rubrics	<p>All rubrics are in English. They are standard rubrics that have been trialled.</p> <p>Each writing task specifies the expected text format/genre, audience, topic and purpose. The required length of the text is indicated in number of words.</p>
Task prompts (input texts and pictures)	<p>The writing tasks are guided by prompts that ensure that the candidates produce enough language to guarantee reliable assessment.</p> <p>The prompts may contain pictures or drawings. They are appropriate for the age and at a language level slightly below the tested level.</p> <p>Input texts contextualise the task in no more than 50 words.</p> <p>Prompts are developed to be free of stereotypes. They offer the opportunity to write from experience, but are designed not to intrude on the student's personal feelings.</p> <p>Prompts are rooted in a communicative framework.</p> <p>All expected content points are clearly mentioned in the prompts.</p>
Weighting of tasks	<p>Short writing task: 1/3 of the total mark for writing.</p> <p>Long writing task: 2/3 of the total mark for writing.</p>
Reporting type	<p>The two tasks will be assessed separately on the basis of the four criteria of the existing writing scale (marking grid in 6eM syllabus).</p>
Rating scale type	<p>Analytic scale criteria described at level A2 of CEF in the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Content• Organisation (coherence and cohesion)• Lexical structures• Grammatical structures

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TEST ADMINISTRATION

Format

The test is administered in paper-and-pencil version.

Known criteria

Test-takers have been informed of the procedure and the assessment criteria in advance (website and brochure).

They have access to a mock version of the test before taking the actual test.

Uniformity of administration

The invigilators (students' regular teachers) have been briefed in advance on how to conduct and observe the whole process of the examination.

The administration time is 5 minutes at the beginning of the test for getting seated and ready for doing the test. Administration time is not included in the test time. Candidates are not allowed to ask any questions after the test has started.

Test-takers will listen to all the recordings twice.

The listening test is administered once a year and the same examination format is used. The agreed assessment criteria and standards are applied.

Physical Conditions

The test should be done in classrooms where the desks are approximately one metre apart and where there is one test taker per desk.

The test booklets should be lying on the desks before the test starts as administration time is not included in the test time.

Students will write their answers into the test booklets themselves. No test booklet may be taken out of the classroom by the test takers after the test has finished.

The students may ask for extra paper for note-taking. Notes are not taken into consideration in scoring, but collected immediately following the test.

The test takers' writing is supposed to be legible and the productions are supposed to be in dark permanent ink (black or blue).

The test takers may only have a couple of pens with them.

Supplementary materials or dictionaries are not allowed.

There should be no disturbing test-external noise in the classroom; invigilators will make sure there is sufficient light at all times as well.

The test takers may point out supposed problems with the test. However, they are not given any answers to questions about the test.

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Test Synoptic Table

	Number of tasks	Number of items	Possible test methods	Focus of test	Length	Time	Total time
Listening	4	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 4-option MCQs and 2 6-option checklists 	Listening to short monologues or dialogues (detailed understanding including phoneme distinction, word recognition...)	n/a	< 20 seconds per monologue / dialogue	30 minutes
		4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-option MCQs MM (4 answers + 2 distractors = 6 options) 	Listening to short monologues or dialogues (main ideas, context, gist)	n/a	< 30 seconds per monologue / dialogue	
		8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TFDS Sentence or table completion (gap-filling with 1-3 words) 3-option MCQs 	Listening to a longer monologue or several connected monologues	n/a	< 2 minutes	
		10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TFDS Sentence or table completion (gap-filling with 1-3 words) Form filling 	Listening to a longer dialogue (specific detail and main ideas)	n/a	< 2 minutes	
Reading	4	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MM (7 answers + 2 distractors = 9 options) Information transfer 	Reading shorter texts (detailed understanding and gist)	n/a		30 minutes
		7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MM (signs and statements + 3 distractors) 3-option MCQs 4-option MCQs 	Reading messages, notices, forms, signs (specific information and gist)	n/a		
		8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-option MCQs TFDS Short answers Banked gap-fill 	Reading longer texts (specific information, detailed understanding, main ideas)	n/a		
		8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-option MCQs TFDS Short answers Banked gap-fill 		n/a		
Writing	2	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided writing 	Interactive writing	70 – 80 words		40 minutes
		n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free writing 	Writing a narrative	120 – 140 words		
TOTAL	10	60 + 2 writing tasks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> syllabi of the respective classes A2 level of CEFR + elements of B1 of CEFR 			100 minutes

MCQs Multiple choice questions

MM Multiple matching

TFDS True / False / Doesn't say