English Language Testing

password

Password Skills Plus

The faster way to prove English language proficiency

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Organised fraud, systematic cheating and differing cultural attitudes to test-taker behaviour create major problems for universities each year when students are enrolled with insufficient English language ability to successfully engage in their studies.

The Password Skills Plus test deters, detects, and disqualifies test-taker cheating whilst at the same time being fair to the majority of candidates who take their test honestly.

1

Secure

Innovative test design, delivery, and review procedures ensure attempts to cheat are systematically picked up and dealt with.

2

Reliable

Accurate and reliable results available within seven working days via our easy to access online validation portal.

3

Accessible

Affordable and easy to schedule twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Securely invigilated online in students' own homes.

Contents

Introduction

English Language Testing (ELT) have been providing universities, colleges, and schools with accurate, reliable, and secure online testing since 2008. Building on the success of the Password Skills test, which is widely used by universities for high-stakes admissions testing, a secure at home version of the test was launched in November 2022.[1]

The test, Password Skills Plus, quickly became popular with both universities and students due to its reliable results and ease of access.

Benefits for universities	Benefits for students
Accurate and reliable results (with a strict "zero tolerance" for cheating)	Easy to schedule twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week
Rapid results	Rapid results
Easy to access online validation portal	Practice materials available online
Popular with students and agents	Affordable and easily accessible

With test security being critical to ELT and our partner universities, invigilation is undertaken by specialist online proctors, providing live human invigilation aided by powerful AI. Each test is video recorded in its entirety and reviewed multiple times ensuring accurate and reliable test results are released to our online validation portal for use by university admissions teams.

A multitude of security features are embedded in the test itself, the invigilation process, and the review procedure. In addition, the test taker to invigilator ratio of 4:1 compares well with a typical test centre ratio of 25:1.

The test was designed and is academically managed by the Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA)[1] and assesses reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It fulfils all Home Office requirements for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the UK and has been formally aligned to the CEFR (A2 to C1).[2]

The test assesses academic English and takes three hours and five minutes in total with all four test modules being delivered online.

Test results are available within seven working days after undergoing a rigorous quality assurance process. Following this, test takers are sent a printable pdf certificate as a record of their achievement, and institutions can independently verify test results by using ELT's secure online validation service. This validation service is free of charge and is accessed by login codes, available on request from ELT.

Password Skills Plus tests are purchased by students directly from ELT's website, and batches of tests can also be purchased at a discount by universities.

1 based at the University of Bedfordshire, founded by Professor Cyril Weir OBE and now directed by Professor Tony Green
2 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a Council of Europe project to describe foreign language proficiency, teaching and assessment in a standard manner

The secure at-home English language test for university admission

Test Security

Innovative test design, delivery, and review procedures ensure attempts to cheat are systematically picked up and dealt with. Question performance is also kept under constant review and random selection of online invigilators prevents any possibility of collusion.

Our proctoring partner, Meazure Learning, is the market leader for scalable online invigilation with exams accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to test-takers anywhere in the world. With over two million proctored exams in 2021 and more than 1,200 invigilators, Meazure Learning offers the lowest candidate to proctor ratio (at most four to one) to the education and certification sectors. As well as ELT, they partner with GMAC, the Goethe Institut and the British Council.

For Password Skills Plus, Meazure Learning uses human proctors backed up by AI monitoring (which flags potential violations of security rules) to check and record test takers' identity and then invigilate the whole test. All test sessions are recorded in their entirety. The proctors' reports and the video recordings are then reviewed by both Meazure Learning and ELT's staff and together with detailed analysis of test results this information is used to determine whether tests can be judged to have been taken in full compliance with our stringent regulations. Tests that pass this review process have their results uploaded into ELT's online validation service.

Summary

Before the test	During the test	After the test
Each test randomised and unique	Live human invigilation and AI throughout	In-depth video review plus stringent academic checks

Quality Assurance Process

Test Session	Live human proctor plus artificial intelligence with video recording
First Audit	Full review of video recording
Second Audit	In depth review of identity, test profile and individual test modules
Marking	Further review of speaking and writing modules
Final Review	Academic Manager makes final decision

"Each test is securely invigilated and cases of suspected malpractice follow a well designed process of investigation by their highly trained staff. Excellent service and easily verified results!"
Eleni Kalli, Director of Administration at City Unity College, Cyprus

Test Specification and Format

Test Specification

Password Skills Plus uses the same test modules as the Password Skills test but for security reasons, the test has different question sets which are downloaded from our large databank of questions each time a test is run.

Test Format

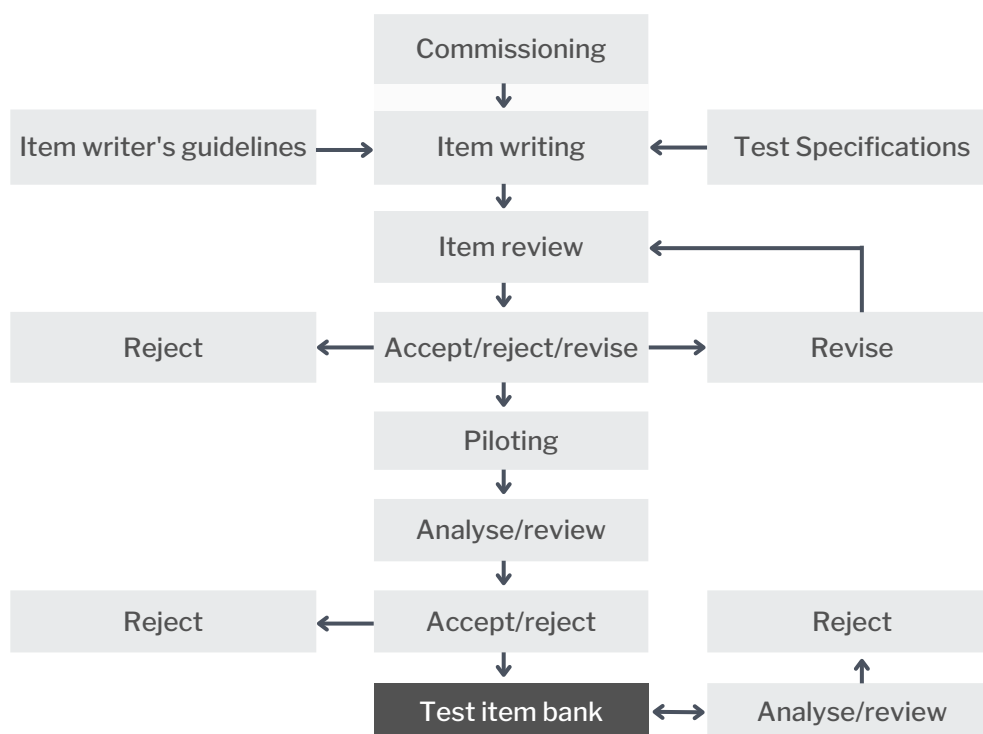|	
Reading	**75 minutes** Consists of five tasks which increase in difficulty as the module progresses. Whilst the tasks are designed to assess academic English, they require no subject specific matter knowledge.
Writing	**30 minutes** Offers test takers a choice of two "open ended" questions, one of which they choose as the subject of an essay. Test takers are instructed to write at least 200 words.
Listening	**60 minutes** Consists of five sections with one or more tasks per section which increase in difficulty as the test module progresses. Most of the recordings are short lectures or snippets of lectures.
Speaking	**20 minutes** Consists of five tasks which are displayed on screen. The responses expected increase in length and complexity as the test module progresses. Responses are captured by a microphone.

Academic Management

All Password English tests are academically designed and managed by CRELLA based at the University of Bedfordshire in the UK. Founded by Professor Cyril Weir OBE and now directed by Professor Tony Green, CRELLA are a research group of world leading experts responsible for the design and validation of many globally renowned English language exams.

In the most recent 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF), 72% of the research CRELLA submitted was assessed as 4* (the highest category), placing CRELLA above Cambridge, Oxford and UCL for research conducted in their field. Password English tests are based on Weir's highly influential socio-cognitive framework, which is now widely used to inform language test development, research and validation.

The tests are formally aligned to the CEFR and designed to match closely the descriptors for language competence between levels A2 to C1. Items for the test are written by a qualified team of item writers with a postgraduate level qualification in Applied Linguistics or a related field (e.g. Cambridge DELTA), and with experience as a teacher of English for Academic Purposes. All item writers are trained in writing items and follow detailed item specifications.

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                          Commissioning
                               ↓
Item writer's guidelines →   Item writing   ←  Test Specifications
                               ↓
                          Item review      ←──────┐
                               ↓                   │
      Reject     ←     Accept/reject/revise  →   Revise
                               ↓
                           Piloting
                               ↓
                         Analyse/review
                               ↓
      Reject     ←        Accept/reject           Reject
                               ↓                     ↑
                         Test item bank  ↔   Analyse/review
```

Alignment to the CEFR

In order to be a suitable test for undergraduate and postgraduate university admission as well as fulfilling Home Office visa requirements, the Password Skills Plus test is formally aligned to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

The CEFR was designed to bring together the best of a wide range of schemes for describing language learning and is internationally recognised as an important framework of reference for language proficiency and has been translated into 40 languages.

The CEFR levels and descriptors were at the forefront of the design, development and production of the Password tests. All Password tests have been formally aligned to the CEFR following the procedures laid out in *"Relating Language Examinations to the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment' (CEFR). A Manual"*.

In terms of the Password test, the procedures were undertaken in the following ways:

Test Design

CRELLA designed the Password Skills test using the CEFR as a reference in design and also by identifying areas of overlap between the Password and the CEFR and making judgements from this overlap on which levels on Password correspond with the CEFR. The aim of this was to establish a clear overview of the relationship between Password and the CEFR.

Alignment Panels

The tests underwent a process of linking to the CEFR managed by panels of experts. Panels were all made up of experienced and well-qualified English language educators within the higher education sector with more than 10 years' of experience in English language teaching. This involved familiarisation (or re-familiarisation) training, followed by training in assessing performance in relation to the CEFR levels, followed by rating Password performance or items in relation to CEFR levels.

Statistical Analysis

Password questions have all been through thorough statistical analysis. Initial questions, which themselves underwent both statistical analysis and alignment, are used as anchors. These questions and their alignment to the CEFR plus correlation to existing test-takers' levels mean that it possible to have a very high confidence in their difficulty level, and can thus be used to compare with and link to further items.

Test Delivery

Password Skills Plus tests are delivered via the Meazure Learning portal, which connects to the Password (test software) Platform. The Password Platform is hosted in a highly secure and redundant data centre in the UK.

Set up simply requires a standard PC with a built-in microphone and built-in or external webcam, along with a stable internet connection with a minimum bandwidth of 2Mbps. Questions are randomly drawn for each unique test taker from a large question bank.

Scoring and Results

Password Skills Plus scores are reported and linked with levels on the CEFR. All four modules use the same scoring system, reporting a score for each skill and an overall score.

"Password 7.0 and above" indicates that the score is at least Password 7.0, but may be higher. "Pre-Password" indicates that the score is below Password 3.0. Percentage scores are also available for the reading and listening modules and these can be used to see how close a test taker is to a particular score boundary.

Password	CEFR
Password 7.0 and above	C1
Password 6.5	B2
Password 6.0	B2
Password 5.5	
Password 5.0	B1
Password 4.5	B1
Password 4.0	
Password 3.5	A1
Password 3.0	A1
Pre-Password	

Test result certificates are emailed to students in seven or less working days of tests being taken and are verified by education institutions through ELT's free online validation service.

Test Design

Password Reading

The design of Password Reading was led by Professor Tony Green at CRELLA. The test employs texts designed to reflect the demands of the A2 to the C1 level based on both CEFR descriptors and Green's work (2012) in identifying the distinctive features of texts at each level in terms of their grammatical, lexical and discoursal features.

The content of the texts is intended to reflect a trajectory leading from relatively general texts to text types that are encountered in academic study. The tasks at the lower levels of the test focus on local processing of words and explicitly stated propositions. The higher levels require test takers to connect ideas at the paragraph level and to form a conceptualisation of the meaning of a text as a whole.

Password Writing

The Password Writing task is a short expository essay on a generally accessible topic, chosen from a choice of two topics presented. The task reflects the kind of writing commonly required in English for Academic Purposes programmes and on tests of academic language skills. The responses are scored on four rating criteria:

- Arguments and evidence.
- Organization.
- Grammar/vocabulary range.
- Grammar/vocabulary control.

There is a clear correspondence between the Password Writing task and the CEFR activity and illustrative scale for Reports and Essays.

Password Listening

Password Listening design was led by Dr John Field at CRELLA and aims to measure students' listening proficiency in terms of different levels of cognitive processing, such as extraction of factual information centring on word-level cues (A2) to following a line of argument (C1).

The listening test draws upon CEFR descriptors and expands to include a range of listening processes that students need to master in an academic context, such as those outlined in research carried out by CRELLA, into the nature of academic language use (Weir et al 2009) and cognitive models proposed by Field for the speaking (2012) and listening (2013) constructs.

Password Speaking

Password Speaking was designed by Professor Lynda Taylor at CRELLA. It was developed to reflect the demands of CEFR descriptors of the A2 through the C1 level (based on the empirical work of Weir 1983, Brown, Iwashita and McNamara 2005, Green 2012, Nakatsuhara and Inoue 2013, and Nakatsuhara 2014).

Putteridge Bury Campus, University of Bedfordshire, home of CRELLA

Recognition

Recognise and accept the Password Skills Plus test

Join our ever-growing global community of education institutions benefitting from our accurate, reliable and secure online test. New partners can be up and running quickly with a no fuss and simple adoption process.

✓ Email us to confirm recognition of the Password Skills Plus test.

✓ Receive login codes for the validation portal along with instructions for your student applicants within 2 working days.

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