Course Companion

BEC Business English

Every topic handout in one volume

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Contents

1. The exam: levels, results and a study plan 2

2. Reading: every part, every level 8

3. Writing: messages, letters, reports and proposals 13

4. Listening: notes, matching and multiple choice 18

5. Speaking: interview, mini-presentation and discussion 23

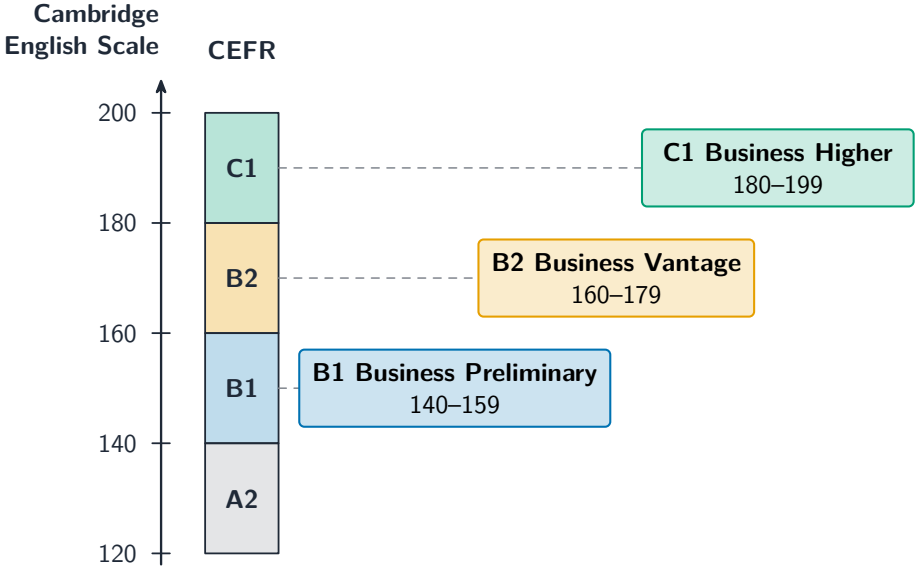
6. Business English toolkit: register, numbers, meetings and negotiating 28

The exam: levels, results and a study plan

BEC Business English

What this topic covers

BEC, the Cambridge **Business English Certificates** , tests the English people use at work: emails, reports, meetings, phone calls and presentations. This topic explains the three levels, what is in each paper, how your result is worked out, and how to plan your preparation.



Three levels, three separate exams: choose one

- **B1 Business Preliminary**: about 2 hours 20 minutes in total.
- **B2 Business Vantage**: about 2 hours 40 minutes.
- **C1 Business Higher**: about 3 hours.
- Each level matches one level of the **CEFR** , the European scale of language levels from A1 to C2.
- Higher is not a harder copy of Vantage. The texts are longer, the tasks ask for more, and the writing is longer. Each level is a separate exam.
- Memory hook: **P**reliminary, **V**antage, **H**igher = **B1, B2, C1**, one step at a time.

The four papers at each level

Every level tests **Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking**, and each skill is **25%** of the result.

	Preliminary (B1)	Vantage (B2)	Higher (C1)
Reading	Reading and Writing in one paper: **1 h 30 min**, 7 reading parts (45 questions) + 2 writing tasks	**1 h**, 5 parts, 45 questions	**1 h**, 6 parts, 52 questions
Writing	(in the same paper)	**45 min**, 2 tasks	**1 h 10 min**, 2 tasks
Listening	about **40 min**, 4 parts, 30 questions	about **40 min**, 3 parts, 30 questions	about **40 min**, 3 parts, 30 questions
Speaking	**12 min**, 3 parts	**14 min**, 3 parts	**16 min**, 3 parts

- At **Preliminary**, Reading and Writing share one paper. You decide how to split the 90 minutes.
- At **Vantage** and **Higher**, Reading and Writing are two papers, each with its own time.
- **Speaking** is always taken **in pairs** with two examiners (a group of three when the numbers are odd).
- You need no business knowledge. Nobody asks you to calculate a profit. You need the **English** of working life.

How your result is worked out

Every candidate gets a **Statement of Results** . It shows a score on the **Cambridge English Scale** for each of the four skills, an **overall score** , a **grade** and a CEFR level.

The overall score is the **average** of the four skill scores. The grade and the CEFR level both come from the overall score, not from any single paper.

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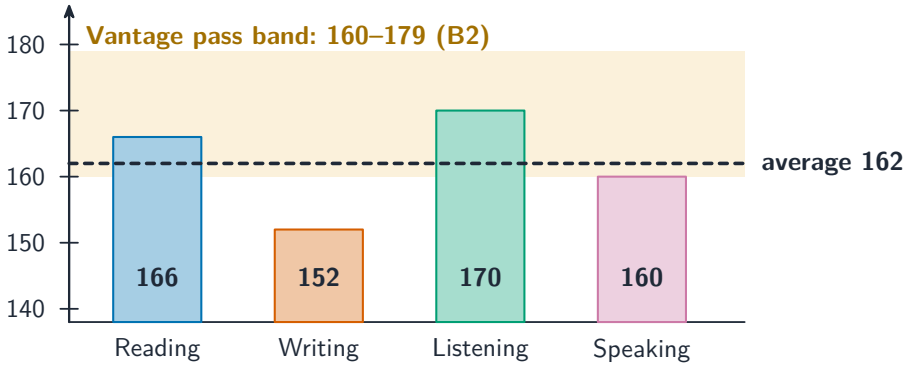
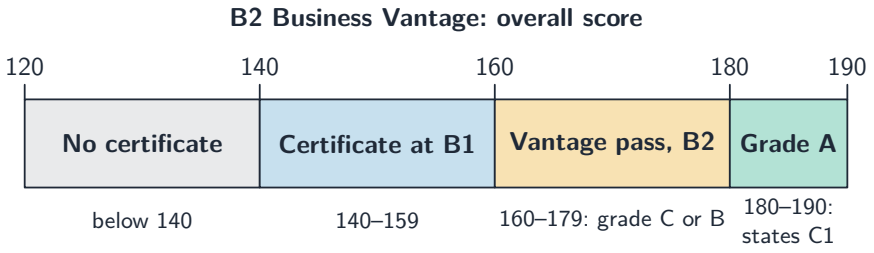


Zhang's four scores average 162: a Vantage pass, but only just

- Zhang: (166 + 152 + 170 + 160) ÷ 4 = 648 ÷ 4 = **162**. That is inside 160–179, so it is a **pass at B2**.
- A strong paper can make up for a weak one. But every paper is worth the **same 25%**, and five extra points in your **weakest** paper are usually easier to win than five more in your best.
- △ Never leave a paper or a writing task blank. 170 + 170 + 170 + 120 = 630, and 630 ÷ 4 = **157.5**: three strong papers and one disaster give **no Vantage pass**.

Grades and certificates

Level	Top result	Pass	One level below
Preliminary	Pass with Distinction, **160–170** (states B2)	Pass or Pass with Merit, **140–159** (B1)	**120–139**: certificate at A2
Vantage	Grade A, **180–190** (states C1)	Grade B or C, **160–179** (B2)	**140–159**: certificate at B1
Higher	Grade A, **200–210** (states C2)	Grade B or C, **180–199** (C1)	**160–179**: certificate at B2



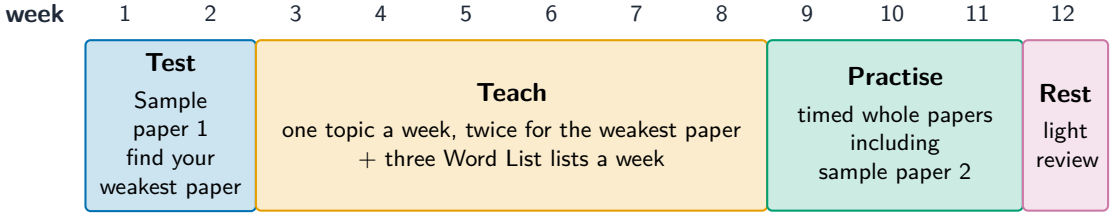
One exam, three possible certificates: Vantage as an example

- A **certificate** can show a level **above or below** the exam's own level.
- Below the "one level below" range, you get the Statement of Results but **no certificate**.
- Cambridge certificates **do not expire**. An employer or a university decides how recent a result must be.

BEC in China: where and when

- Since **2025**, BEC is offered **only in mainland China**. Cambridge stopped it in every other country.
- The **NEEA** (National Education Examinations Authority) runs it **once a year**, on its BEC website (bec.neea.edu.cn).
- In **2026**: **registration** from **11 to 17 March**; written papers on **16 May** (Preliminary and Higher) and **23 May** (Vantage); Speaking on the next day.
- The registration window is only **one week** long, and seats can run out. Check the NEEA site from January for the next year's dates.
- A failed attempt costs a whole year, so choose the level you can pass **now or after a few months of study**, not the level you hope to reach one day.

A 12-week study plan



Twelve weeks: test, teach, practise, rest

- **Weeks 1–2:** do official **sample paper** 1 for your level from the Library, with a timer. Mark it with the answer key and find your **weakest paper**.

- **Weeks 3–8:** one topic of this course per week, and **twice** for your weakest paper. Learn **three lists** of the BEC Word List each week.
- **Weeks 9–11:** timed practice of **whole papers**, including official **sample paper 2**.
- **Week 12:** light review, early nights, and nothing new.

Test day: the time rules

- **Reading** answers go onto a separate **answer sheet** **inside** the paper's time. There is no extra time to copy them, so copy your answers **after each part**.
- **Listening** gives you time at the end to copy answers: **5 minutes** at Preliminary, **10 minutes** at Vantage and Higher. Write on the question paper while you listen.
- At **Preliminary**, a sensible split of the 90 minutes is about **55 minutes** for the 45 reading questions and **35 minutes** for the two writing tasks. Nobody will tell you to move on.
- Bring a watch you can see easily. The clock in the room may be behind you.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Choosing the level by ambition.** Many students choose Higher because it "looks better". A Vantage pass with grade A states C1 anyway; a failed Higher may give only B2.
- △ **Studying only Reading and grammar.** Each of the four skills is 25%. Speaking and Writing need practice with your voice and your pen, every week.
- △ **Copying Reading answers at the end.** At the end there is no time left. Copy after each part.

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Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. A Vantage candidate scores Reading 172, Writing 158, Listening 176, Speaking 166. What is the overall score, and what is the result?
2. A Preliminary candidate's overall score is 163. Which grade, and which CEFR level does the certificate state?
3. A Higher candidate's overall score is 175. Does she get a certificate? At which level?
4. Li Ming is strong in Reading and weak in Writing. He has six weeks. How should he split them?
5. Which two papers are one paper at Preliminary?
6. How long do you have to copy Listening answers at Vantage?

Answers. 1 $(172 + 158 + 176 + 166) \div 4 = 672 \div 4 =$ **168**: a Vantage **pass at B2**. 2 **Pass with Distinction**; the certificate states **B2**. 3 **Yes**, a certificate at **B2** (160–179 is one level below Higher). 4 Writing first and most: for example **two weeks** on Writing, one week each on the other three papers, and one week of timed practice. 5 **Reading and Writing** (1 hour 30 minutes). 6 **10 minutes**.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How is the overall score worked out? – It is the **average of the four skill scores**.
2. Which skill counts most? – **None.** Each skill is **25%** of the result.
3. Can a Vantage candidate get a C1 certificate? – **Yes**, with grade A (**180–190**).
4. How often does BEC run in China? – **Once a year**, organised by the NEEA.
5. Do BEC certificates expire? – **No.** An employer or university decides how recent a result must be.

Vocabulary card meanings

Business English Certificates: Cambridge exams that test the English used at work, at three levels. CEFR: The Common European Framework of Reference, a set of language levels from A1 to C2. Statement of Results: The document every candidate receives, with a score for each skill and the overall result. Cambridge English Scale: The score scale used by Cambridge exams, for example 160 to 179 for B2. overall score: The average of the four skill scores, which gives the grade. grade: The letter or name that shows how well a candidate passed, such as A, B or C. certificate: The official document that shows a candidate reached a language level. registration: Signing up for an exam before the closing date. sample paper: An official practice test that shows the real format of an exam. answer sheet: The paper where test takers mark or write their final answers.

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Reading: every part, every level

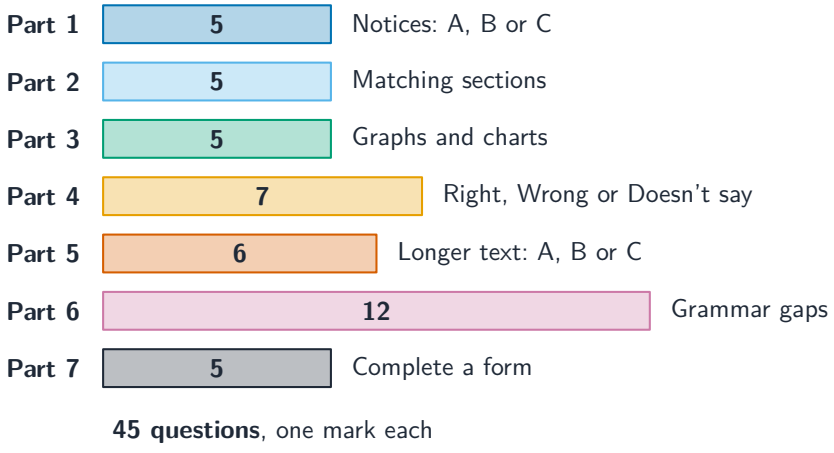
BEC Business English

What this topic covers

BEC Reading uses the texts people meet at work: notices, emails, adverts, articles and reports. This topic shows every part of the Reading paper at the three levels, the skill each part tests, and how to work fast without losing marks.

- **Preliminary:** 7 reading parts, 45 questions, in the 1 h 30 min Reading and Writing paper.
- **Vantage:** 5 parts, 45 questions, 1 hour.
- **Higher:** 6 parts, 52 questions, 1 hour.
- Each question is worth **one mark**, and a blank earns nothing.
- Memory hook: the early parts test **meaning**; the later parts test **words and grammar**.

Preliminary Reading, part by part



Preliminary: seven short parts, 45 questions

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Part	Questions	What you read	What you do
1	5	short notices, messages, labels	choose A, B or C
2	5	one text in sections (e.g. adverts)	match questions to sections
3	5	graphs or charts	match sentences to graphs
4	7	one longer text	**Right**, **Wrong** or **Doesn't say**
5	6	one longer text	choose A, B or C
6	12	a text with gaps	choose the word (grammar)
7	5	e.g. an email and a memo	complete a form or notes

- **Part 3:** read the **graph**, not the words. A sentence such as *"Sales rose steadily, then fell sharply"* matches only one line shape.
- **Part 4:** *Right* means the text says it; *Wrong* means the text says the opposite; *Doesn't say* means the text gives no answer. Never use what you know about the company.
- **Part 7:** copy the facts **exactly** from the texts, with correct spelling. A wrong letter in a name loses the mark.

Vantage and Higher Reading

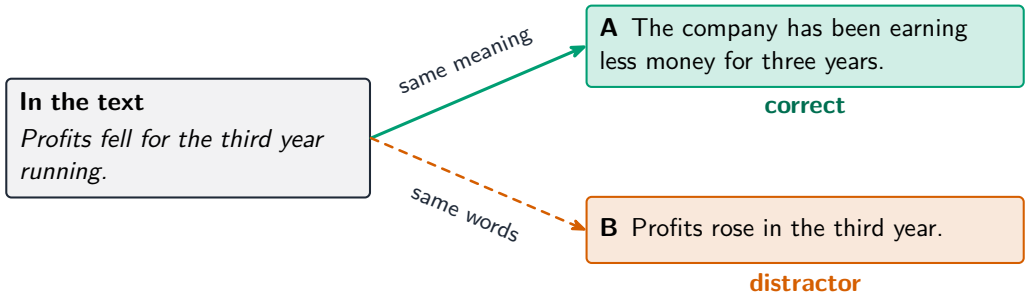
	Vantage (1 hour, 45 questions)	Higher (1 hour, 52 questions)
Part 1	7 questions: match statements to **four** short texts	8 questions: match to **five** short texts
Part 2	5 gaps: put **sentences** back into an article	6 gaps: the same task
Part 3	6 questions: choose A, B, C or D	6 questions: choose A, B, C or D
Part 4	**15** gaps, multiple-choice cloze	**10** gaps, multiple-choice cloze
Part 5	**12** lines of **proofreading**	**10** gaps, **open cloze** (one word each)
Part 6	–	**12** lines of proofreading

- **Matching** (Part 1): read the statements first, then **scan** the texts for each one. The statement uses different words from the text.

- **Gapped text** (Part 2): one sentence is extra. The right sentence fits the **ideas** and the **grammar** on both sides of the gap.
- **Multiple-choice cloze** : all four options often mean something similar. Only one fits the words around it: *place an order*, *meet a deadline*, *raise prices*.
- **Proofreading:** some lines are correct; the others have **one extra word**. Write the extra word, or *CORRECT*.

The key skill: paraphrase

The question almost never repeats the words of the text. It uses a **paraphrase** : the same meaning in different words. The option that repeats the text's words is often the **distractor** .

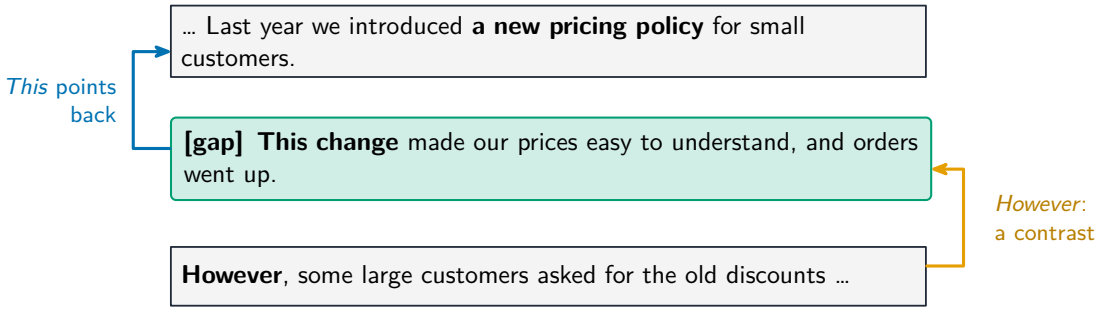


Match the meaning, not the words

In the text	In the question
postponed until next month	*will take place later than planned*
staff turnover is high	*many employees leave*
the figures are not yet available	*the results have not been published*
we have outgrown our office	*the company needs more space*

Gapped text: follow the links

In Part 2 at Vantage and Higher, each missing sentence is held in place by small words: a **reference word** (*this, these, they, such*), a **linking word** (*however, as a result, also*) and repeated ideas.



A sentence fits only when it links both ways

- Read the sentences **before and after** each gap. Ask: what does *this* refer to? Does *however* show a contrast?
- Put in the sentences you are sure of first. The last gaps become easier.
- Check the extra sentence at the end: it should fit **nowhere**.

Timing and answer sheets

- About **one minute per question** at Preliminary leaves about 35 minutes for writing.
- At Vantage and Higher you have one hour for Reading alone. Don't spend 20 minutes on Part 1: about **10 minutes per part** is a safe plan.
- Answers go onto the **answer sheet** inside the time. Copy after each part.
- **Skim** a long text first (one minute, for the main idea of each paragraph), then read for the answers.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Choosing the option with the same word.** Same word, different meaning: the classic distractor. Look for the paraphrase.
- △ **Translating every word.** Read in phrases and keep moving. Use the context for an unknown word.
- △ **Writing two words in an open-cloze gap.** One gap, one word: *a*, *the*, *which*, *for*, *despite*.
- △ **Missing the extra *the* or *to* in proofreading.** Chinese has no articles, so an extra *the* looks normal. Read each line aloud in your head.

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. Text: *"The launch has been put back to the spring."* Statement: *"The product will appear earlier than planned."* Right, Wrong or Doesn't say?

2. Text: *"Our sales team grew by 20% last year."* Statement: *"The company made more profit last year."* Right, Wrong or Doesn't say?
3. Which word fits? *We need to* _____ *a decision by Friday.* A do B make C get D give
4. Open cloze, one word: *The meeting was cancelled because* _____ *the bad weather.*
5. Proofreading: *We will send you the goods as soon as they will arrive.* Which word is extra?
6. Gap: *"…we introduced flexible hours. [?] However, managers worried about meetings."* Which sentence fits: A *This was popular with most staff.* B *The building has three floors.*

Answers. 1 **Wrong**: *put back* means later. 2 **Doesn't say**: more staff tells us nothing about profit. 3 **B make**: *make a decision* is the collocation. 4 **of** (*because of*). 5 **will**: after *as soon as*, use the present (*as soon as they arrive*). 6 **A**: *This* refers to flexible hours, and *However* contrasts with "popular".

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How many questions are in Preliminary Reading? – **45**, in seven parts.
2. In Part 4 at Preliminary, what does *Doesn't say* mean? – The text gives **no answer** either way.
3. What do you write in proofreading for a correct line? – **CORRECT**.
4. How many words go in an open-cloze gap? – **One**.
5. Why is the option with the text's own words often wrong? – It is a **distractor**: the right answer usually paraphrases.

Vocabulary card meanings

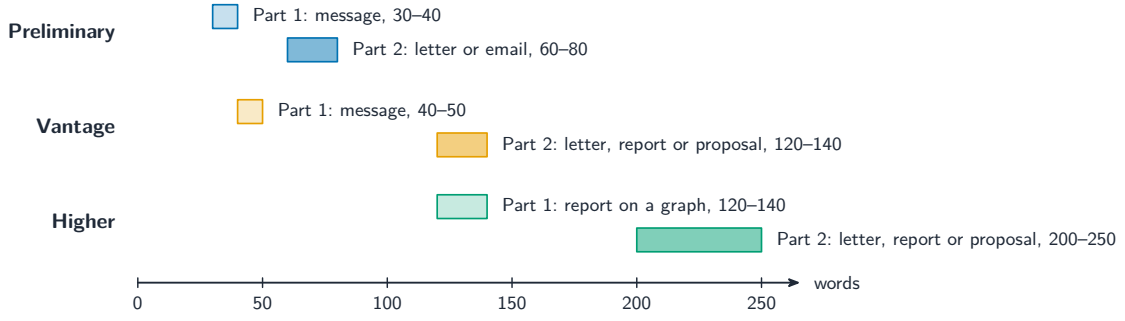
proofreading: Checking a text line by line to find and correct mistakes. open cloze: A gap-fill task where you write one word in each gap, with no options. scan: To look quickly through a text for one particular piece of information. gapped text: A text with missing sentences that you must put back in the right places. multiple-choice cloze: A gap-fill task where you choose the right word for each gap from options. paraphrase: Saying the same meaning with different words. distractor: A wrong option that is designed to look right. reference word: A word such as this or they that points back to something already mentioned. skim: To read a text quickly to get the main idea.

Writing: messages, letters, reports and proposals

BEC Business English

What this topic covers

Every BEC level has **two writing tasks**. The first is short and usually internal (to a colleague); the second is longer and usually for someone outside the company or for a manager. This topic shows each task at each level, the shape of a good answer, model answers, and how examiners give marks.



Two tasks at each level: the second one is longer and counts more

	Preliminary	Vantage	Higher
Time	inside the 1 h 30 min Reading and Writing paper	**45 min**	**1 h 10 min**
Part 1	note, message, **memo** or email to a colleague, **30–40** words	the same, **40–50** words	a short **report** on a graph or chart, **120–140** words
Part 2	letter or email to someone outside the company, **60–80** words	letter or email, **or** a short report or **proposal**, **120–140** words	**one task from three**: letter, report or proposal, **200–250** words

- Part 2 is worth **twice** as much as Part 1, so give it about **two thirds** of your writing time.
- Keep to the **word count**. A much shorter answer usually misses information; a much longer one usually adds things nobody asked for.

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Part 1: a short message with three jobs

The task gives **three content points** as bullets. You must cover **all three**, and you usually have to invent small details: a day, a reason, a number.

> **Task (Preliminary):** You have to change the time of next week's sales meeting. Write an email to your team: say which meeting is changing, give the new time, explain why.
>
> *Hi everyone, Thursday's sales meeting is moving from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., because the new price list will not be ready until midday. Please bring your monthly figures. Thanks, Lin*

- 31 words. The three points: **which meeting** (Thursday's sales meeting), **the new time** (2 p.m.), **why** (the price list). One clear purpose. A short message needs **no** long greeting and **no** "I am writing to inform you".
- Start with the most important information. Your colleague should understand the change from the first line.

Part 2: letters and emails

Greeting	*Dear Ms Wang,*
Point 1: say sorry	*Thank you for your email. I am very sorry that …*
Point 2: the reason	*This was because …*
Point 3: what you will do	*We have now changed to …*
Point 4: an offer	*To apologise, we would like to offer …*
Ending	*Yours sincerely, David Chen*

One paragraph for each content point, and a clear next step

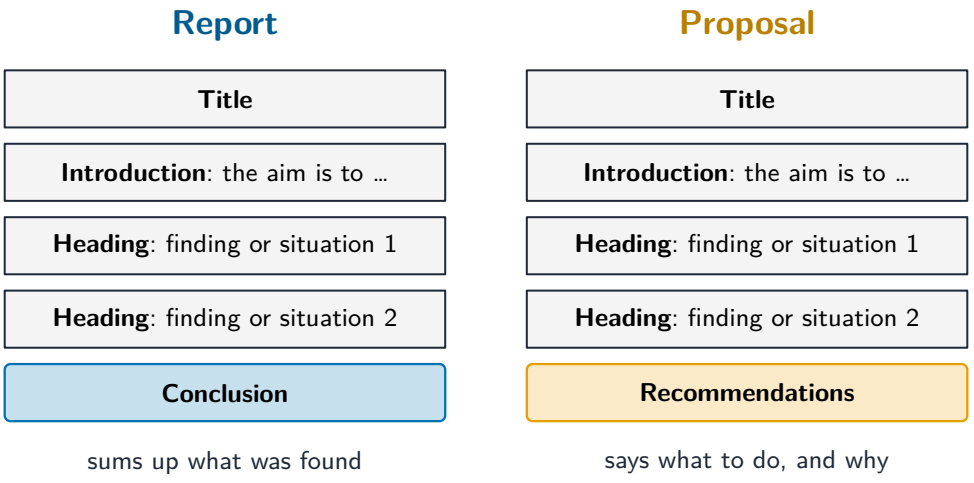
> **Task (Preliminary):** A customer has complained that her order arrived late. Reply: apologise, explain the reason, say what you will do, offer something.
>
> *Dear Ms Wang, Thank you for your email. I am very sorry that your order arrived three days late. This was because our delivery company had problems with its vans last week. We have now changed to a new company, and your next order will arrive within two days. To apologise, we would*

like to offer you 10% off your next order. Yours sincerely, David Chen

- 66 words. Each content point has its own sentence or paragraph.
- Choose the **register** for the reader: a customer you don't know needs *Dear Ms Wang* and *Yours sincerely*; a colleague you know can get *Hi Tom* and *Thanks*.

Reports and proposals

A **report** describes what happened or what was found. A **proposal** describes a situation and gives a **recommendation**: it tries to persuade the reader to do something. The two look almost the same on the page.



Headings help a busy manager find the point in seconds

- Use a **title** and **short headings**: *Introduction*, *Current situation*, *Recommendations*.
- Start with the purpose: *The aim of this report is to…*
- Use neutral, impersonal language: *It was found that…*, *Most staff said…*, *I would recommend that…*
- **Higher Part 1** is a report on figures from a graph or table. Describe the biggest changes and compare them. △ Don't explain causes the graph doesn't give.

How examiners mark your writing

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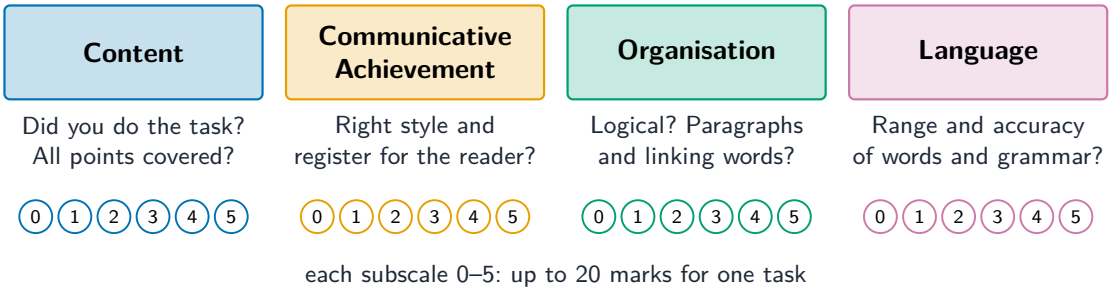

Four equal subscales: grammar is only one of them

- Each answer gets **0–5** on each of four **subscales** , so up to **20** marks per task.
- **Content:** all the points, with enough detail; the reader is fully informed.
- **Communicative Achievement** : the right style and register for the reader and the purpose.
- **Organisation:** paragraphs, headings, and **linking words** (*however*, *as a result*, *which*) that join ideas.
- **Language:** a range of business words and grammar, used accurately enough that the reader never has to guess.
- △ Perfect grammar can't make up for a **missing content point**.

Your writing routine

1. **Read the task twice.** Underline the content points and the reader.
2. **Plan for two minutes:** one line per paragraph.
3. **Write**, ticking each content point as you cover it.
4. **Check for two minutes:** points, register, word count, your typical errors (articles, plurals, tense).

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Too formal for a colleague, too friendly for a customer.** *Dear Sir, I hereby inform you…* to a teammate sounds strange; *Hi dude* to a customer loses marks.
- △ **Missing articles and plurals.** *Please send invoice* → *Please send **the** invoice. Two order* → *two order**s**.*
- △ **Learned phrases that don't fit.** Opening every email with *With the development of the economy…* wastes words and the reader's time.
- △ **Skipping a content point to save words.** Every point counts for Content.

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. A Part 1 task has three bullets. Your answer covers two very well. Which subscale loses most?
2. Rewrite for a customer: *Hi! Sorry about the mess. We'll fix it ASAP.*
3. Report or proposal? *"I would recommend moving the training to Fridays."*
4. Which register: an email to a supplier you have never met?
5. Correct the sentence: *Please send me price list before Friday.*
6. Vantage Part 2: you have written 95 words. What is probably wrong?

Answers. 1 **Content**: one point is missing. 2 For example: *Dear Mr Li, I am very sorry for the problem. We will correct it as soon as possible.* 3 **Proposal**: it recommends an action. 4 **Formal**: *Dear Mr…*, *I would be grateful if…*, *Yours sincerely.* 5 *Please send me **the** price list before Friday.* 6 It is too short (120–140 needed): a point is probably missing or has too little detail.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How many words in Vantage Part 1? – **40–50**.
2. Which part counts more? – **Part 2**, twice as much as Part 1.
3. What are the four subscales? – **Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation, Language**.
4. What is the difference between a report and a proposal? – A proposal **recommends** an action and tries to persuade.
5. What must you do with every content point? – **Cover it**, with enough detail.

Vocabulary card meanings

memo: A short written message sent inside a company. report: A document that describes what happened or what was found, often with headings. proposal: A document that describes a situation and recommends what to do. word count: The number of words a task asks for, or the number you have written. content point: One thing the task tells you to include in your answer. register: How formal or informal your language is, chosen for the reader. recommendation: A suggestion about what someone should do. subscale: One of the separate parts that a piece of writing is marked on. Communicative Achievement: How well the writing suits its reader and purpose, the right style and register. linking word: A word such as however or as a result that joins ideas.

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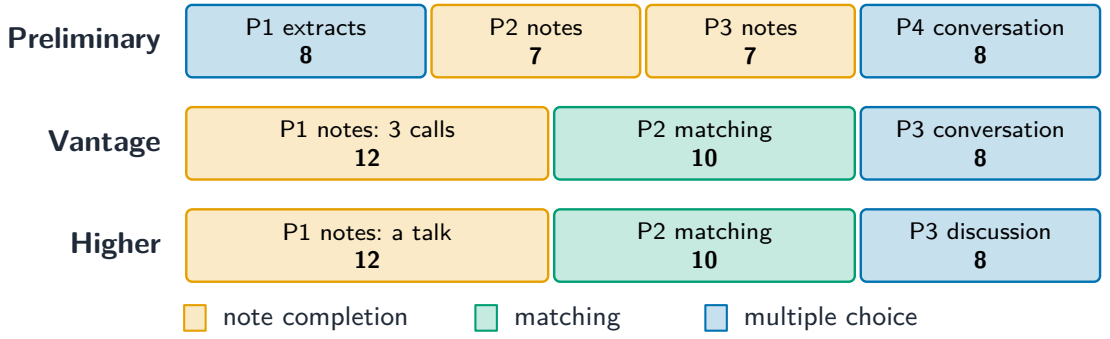
Listening: notes, matching and multiple choice

BEC Business English

What this topic covers

BEC Listening uses the sounds of working life: phone calls, voicemails, briefings, interviews and meetings. Every level has **30 questions** in about **40 minutes**, and you hear **every recording twice**. This topic shows each part, the skill it tests, and a routine for each task type.



Thirty questions at every level, in three or four parts

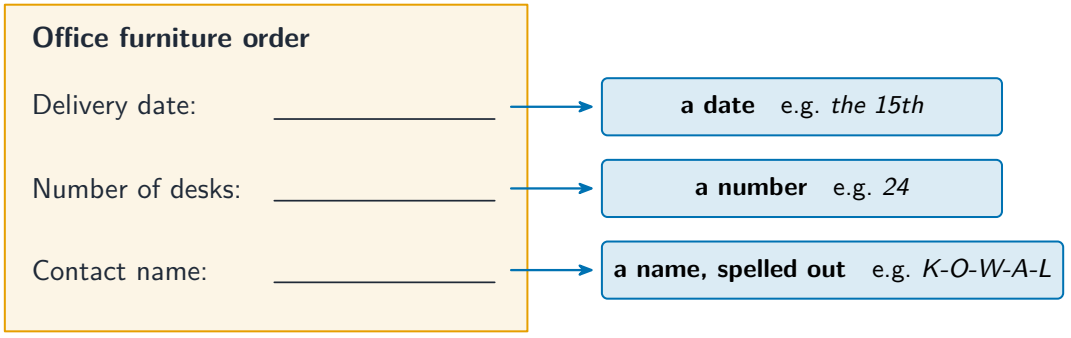
	Preliminary	Vantage	Higher
Note completion	Part 2: a phone call, **7** gaps · Part 3: a talk, **7** gaps	Part 1: **3** short calls, **4** gaps each	Part 1: a 2–3-minute talk, **12** gaps
Matching	–	Part 2: **2** × **5** short **monologues**, options A–H	Part 2: the same, **10** questions
Multiple choice	Part 1: **8** short **extracts** · Part 4: a conversation, **8** questions	Part 3: a conversation, **8** questions, A–C	Part 3: an interview or discussion, **8** questions, A–C
Copy answers	**5** minutes at the end	**10** minutes	**10** minutes

- Write on the **question paper** while you listen. At the end you get **transfer time** to copy your answers onto the answer sheet.

- The questions follow the **order** of the recording. If you miss one, let it go and listen for the next.

Note completion: predict, then listen

In **note completion** you fill gaps in notes, a form or a message. Before the recording starts, **predict** what kind of word fits each gap.



Know what kind of answer you need before you hear it

The note says	Predict
Delivery date: _____	a date: *the 14th*, *next Tuesday*
Price per unit: £ _____	a number: *2.50*
Contact: _____	a name: the speaker may **spell out** the letters
Problem with: the _____	a noun: *printer*, *invoice*

- **Preliminary:** answers are mostly numbers, dates, prices and names. **Vantage:** one or two words. **Higher:** up to three words.
- Write the words you **hear**. Don't change their form.
- Spelling must be correct, especially for a name the speaker spells out. Practise the English alphabet: *A, E, I* and *G, J* are the letters Chinese learners most often mix up.

The first answer is often wrong

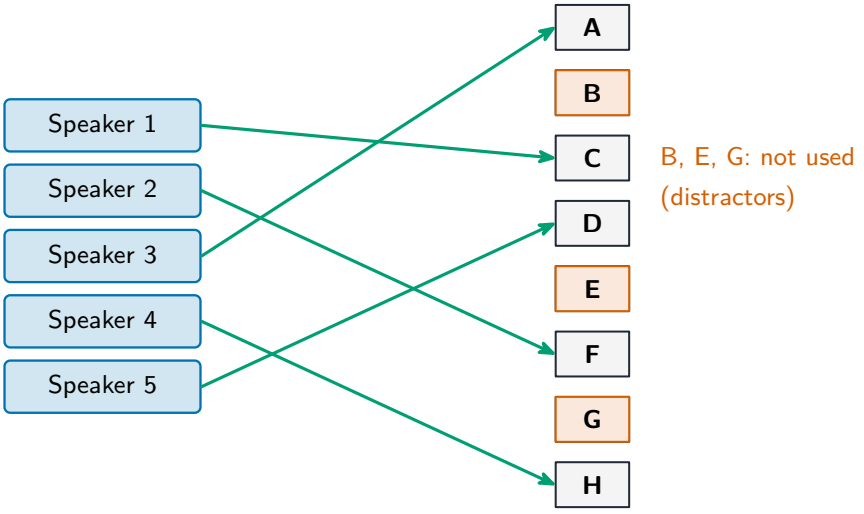
Speakers in business correct themselves. The recording often gives one answer, then changes it.

> *"The meeting is on the 14th… oh no, sorry, they moved it. It's the 16th now."*

- Answer: **16th**. The first number was a trap.
- Listen for words that change an answer: *actually*, *sorry*, *no*, *wait*, *they changed it*, *it was going to be…* *but*.

Matching: five speakers, eight options

In Vantage and Higher Part 2 you hear **five** short monologues, twice, and answer **two tasks** at the same time. Each task has **eight** options for five speakers, so three options are not used.



Five speakers, eight options: three are left over

- The speaker almost never says the option's words. Listen for the **gist** : the main point of what they say.
- A speaker who says *"price"* may be talking about service. The word match is the trap.
- First listening: note your best guess for each speaker in task one. Second listening: check task one and answer task two.

Multiple choice: follow the conversation

- Read the questions and options **before** the recording, and underline the key words.
- Listen for the speaker's **attitude** and opinion, not only facts: *"I'm not convinced"* means doubt; *"I couldn't agree more"* means strong agreement.
- Two speakers may disagree. Check **who** the question asks about.
- One option often repeats a word you hear but says something different. The correct option usually paraphrases.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **-teen and -ty numbers.** *Fifteen* (fif-**TEEN**) and *fifty* (**FIF**-ty) sound close. Listen for the stress and the long *ee* at the end.
- △ **Writing a whole sentence.** The gap needs a word or two, not *"because the printer is broken"*.
- △ **Stopping after a missed answer.** One lost answer must not cost three more. Move on.
- △ **Forgetting to copy answers.** Answers on the question paper alone get no marks.

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. A note says *Order number:* ____. What kind of answer do you predict?
2. You hear: *"The training's on Monday. No, wait, Tuesday, because Monday's a holiday."* What do you write?
3. You hear *"fifty"*, with the stress on *FIF*. Which number?
4. A Vantage note-completion gap allows one or two words. You hear *"the new photocopier in reception"*. Which words could fit *Problem with: the* ____?
5. Speaker 3 says: *"The products were fine, but whenever we called, nobody answered."* Which option: A low quality B poor customer service C high prices?
6. How many options are left unused in a Part 2 matching task?

Answers. 1 A **number** (perhaps with letters). 2 **Tuesday**. 3 **50**. 4 **photocopier** (or *new photocopier*). 5 **B**: nobody answered the phone. 6 **Three** (eight options, five speakers).

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Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How many times do you hear each recording? – **Twice**.
2. How many questions are in BEC Listening? – **30**, at every level.
3. How long is the transfer time at Vantage? – **10 minutes** (5 at Preliminary).
4. What should you do before a note-completion recording starts? – **Predict** the kind of word for each gap.
5. In matching, why is a word you hear often a trap? – The answer is the **gist**, usually in different words.

Vocabulary card meanings

monologue: A long talk by one person. extract: A short part taken from a longer recording or text. transfer time: Extra time at the end of a listening test to copy answers onto the answer sheet. note completion: A task where you fill gaps in notes or a form with words you hear. predict: To say what you think will happen or come next. spell out: To say the letters of a word one by one. gist: The main idea of what someone says or writes. attitude: What a person thinks or feels about something.

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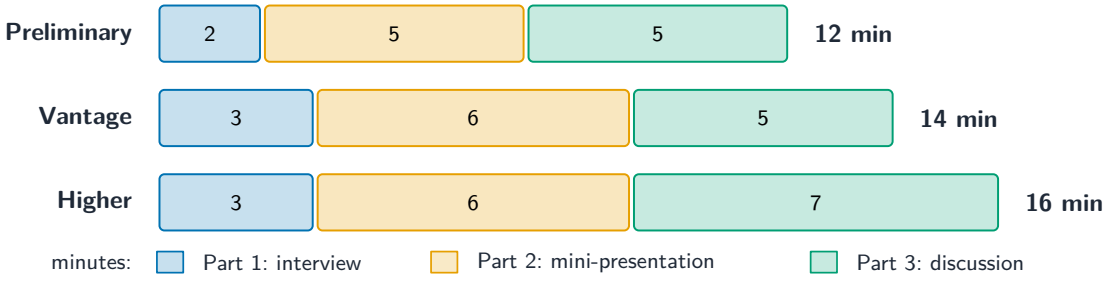
Speaking: interview, mini-presentation and discussion

BEC Business English

What this topic covers

The BEC Speaking test is a short, friendly business conversation with three parts. You take it **in a pair**, with two examiners. This topic shows what happens in each part, how the examiners give marks, and simple patterns that make your answers longer, clearer and more natural.



Three parts at every level: talk about yourself, give a short talk, discuss together

	Preliminary	Vantage	Higher
Whole test	12 minutes	14 minutes	16 minutes
Part 1: interview	about 2 minutes	about 3 minutes	about 3 minutes
Part 2: mini-presentation	about 5 minutes	about 6 minutes	about 6 minutes
Part 3: discussion	about 5 minutes	about 5 minutes	about 7 minutes

- One examiner, the **interlocutor** , asks the questions and gives you the tasks. The other, the **assessor** , only listens and marks.
- If the numbers are odd, the last three candidates take the test as a group of three.

Part 1: the interview

The interlocutor asks each of you about yourself (your name, your work or studies, where you live), then about business topics: your opinions and preferences.

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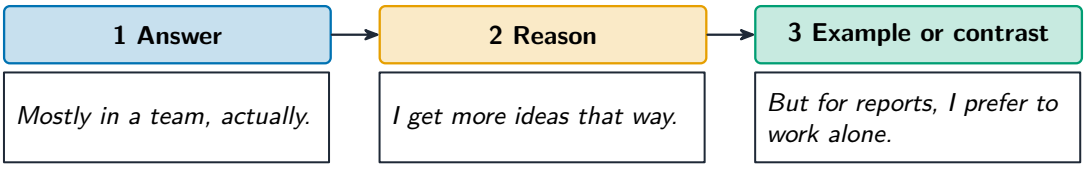
Do you prefer working alone or in a team?



Answer, reason, example: two or three sentences, about 15–20 seconds

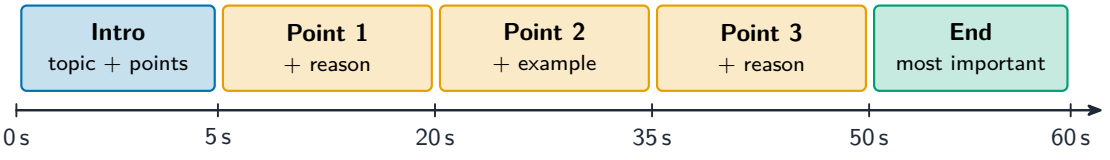
- △ *"Yes."* and silence gives the examiner nothing to mark.
- △ A one-minute speech is also wrong: your partner needs time too.
- Useful starts: *I'd say…*, *It depends on…*, *To be honest, I prefer…*, *For example, last month…*

Part 2: the mini-presentation

This is the **long turn** : about one minute of talk on a business topic, alone.

	Preliminary	**Vantage**	**Higher**
Choice	one topic from **two**	one topic from **three**	one topic from **three**
Preparation	1 minute	1 minute	1 minute
Your talk	about 1 minute	about 1 minute	about 1 minute
Afterwards	your partner says which point they think is most important	your partner asks you a question	your partner asks you a question

Each **prompt card** has a title, such as *What is important when choosing a supplier?*, and two or three points.

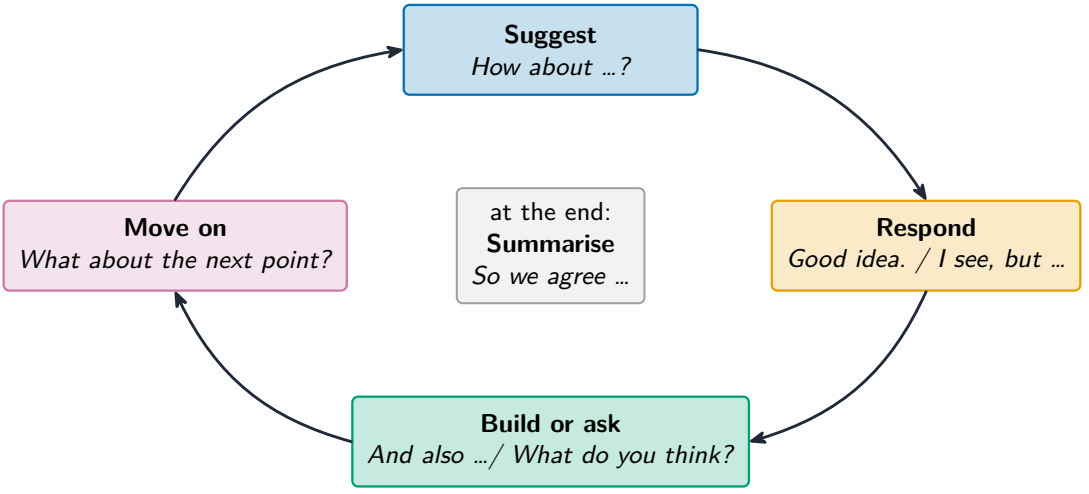


Introduce, three points with reasons, conclude

- In the minute of preparation, write **key words only**, never sentences.
- Use **signposts** so the examiner can follow you: *There are three things to think about. First,… Another point is… Finally,… So, for me, the most important thing is…*
- **Listen to your partner's talk.** You will answer or ask a question about it.

Part 3: the discussion

You and your partner discuss a business situation together, as colleagues. At Preliminary there are pictures or written prompts; at Vantage a topic with points; at Higher a short situation with two discussion points. Then the interlocutor asks a few more questions on the same theme.



Suggest, respond, build or ask, move on, and summarise at the end

Job	Phrases
Suggest	*Why don't we…?* · *How about…?* · *I think we should…*
Agree	*Good idea.* · *That's true, and also…*
Disagree politely	*I see what you mean, but…* · *That's a good point, although…*
Ask	*What do you think?* · *Which would you choose?*
Summarise	*So we agree that…* · *Shall we say… then?*

- Keep turns **short** so the talk goes back and forth.
- Aim to **reach a decision**, or at least to compare the ideas and say which you prefer.

How the examiners mark you

- The **assessor** gives marks for **grammar and vocabulary**, **discourse management** (longer answers that are organised and linked), **pronunciation** and **interactive communication** (taking turns, responding to your partner, keeping the talk going).
- The **interlocutor** gives one overall mark for the whole test.
- At Higher, grammar and vocabulary are marked separately.

- Every candidate is marked **alone**: a quiet partner does not lower your mark, and a strong partner does not raise it.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Learning answers by heart.** Examiners hear a recited answer at once, and it often doesn't fit the question. Learn **patterns** and phrases, not speeches.
- △ **Waiting to be invited.** In Part 3, nobody tells you when to speak. Ask your partner questions and respond.
- △ **Flat stress.** English stresses the key word: *I'd **pre**fer the **cheap**er one.* Practise reading model answers aloud with the stress.
- △ **Silence when you don't know a word.** Say it another way: *the thing you use to… / a kind of…*

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. Turn this into a good Part 1 answer: *Q: Do you like working in a team? A: Yes.*
2. Your card: *What is important when organising a business trip?* Points: cost, timing, hotel. Write a one-line introduction.
3. Your partner says: *"I think we should advertise online."* You disagree. What could you say?
4. Which part has one minute of preparation?
5. Your partner talks for three minutes in Part 3 and you say almost nothing. What does the assessor lose information about?
6. Give a signpost for your last point.

Answers. 1 For example: *Yes, mostly. I get more ideas in a team, but for writing reports I prefer to work alone.* 2 For example: *There are three things to think about when organising a business trip: cost, timing and the hotel.* 3 *I see what you mean, but online adverts are expensive for a small shop. How about the local newspaper?* 4 **Part 2**, the mini-presentation. 5 **Your interactive communication** (and your language: there is little to mark). 6 *Finally, …* or *The last point is…*

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How long is the Vantage Speaking test? – **14 minutes**.
2. What does the assessor do? – **Listens and marks**; the interlocutor asks the questions.
3. How long is your mini-presentation? – **About one minute**, after one minute of preparation.

4. What is the aim of Part 3? – To **discuss** with your partner and **reach a decision** or compare ideas.
5. Does a weak partner lower your mark? – **No.** Each candidate is marked alone.

Vocabulary card meanings

interlocutor: The examiner who asks the questions and gives the tasks in a speaking test. assessor: The examiner who listens and gives marks but does not speak. long turn: A part of a speaking test where one person talks alone for about a minute. prompt card: A card with a topic and points to help you prepare a talk. signpost: A phrase such as first or finally that shows the listener where your talk is going. discourse management: Speaking in longer, organised and linked turns. pronunciation: How you say sounds, words and sentences. interactive communication: Taking turns, responding to your partner and keeping a conversation going.

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Business English toolkit: register, numbers, meetings and negotiating

BEC Business English

What this topic covers

Some English appears in every BEC paper: choosing how formal to be, saying and hearing numbers, describing changes in figures, and the phrases of phone calls, meetings and negotiations. This topic collects that toolkit in one place, so you can use it in Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking.

- **Register**: how formal to be, and how to change it.
- **Numbers**: money, decimals, dates, and the *-teen* / *-ty* trap.
- **Trends**: words for going up, going down and staying the same.
- **Phone calls, meetings, negotiating**: the phrases for each stage.

Register: friendly, neutral, formal

	Friendly	Neutral	Formal
Use it with	colleagues you know well	most colleagues, regular customers	new customers, suppliers, complaints, senior managers you don't know
Greeting	*Hi Tom,*	*Dear Tom,* · *Hello Ms Li,*	*Dear Ms Li,* · *Dear Sir or Madam,*
Asking	*Can you…?*	*Could you…, please?*	*I would be grateful if you could…*
Ending	*Thanks, Amy*	*Best regards,*	*Yours sincerely,* · *Yours faithfully,*

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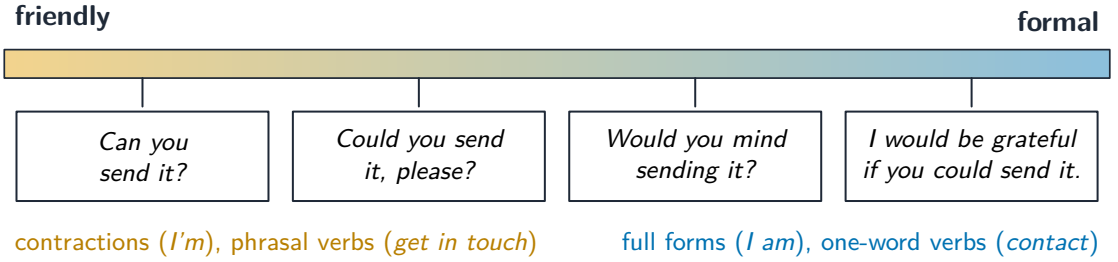


The same request, four levels of formality

- **Formal** English uses full forms (*I am*, not *I'm*), longer polite phrases and one-word verbs: *receive*, *contact*, *postpone*.
- **Friendly** English uses a **contraction** (*I'm*, *we'll*) and a **phrasal verb** (*get in touch*, *put off*, *find out*).
- *Yours sincerely* follows *Dear Ms Li* (you know the name); *Yours faithfully* follows *Dear Sir or Madam* (you don't).

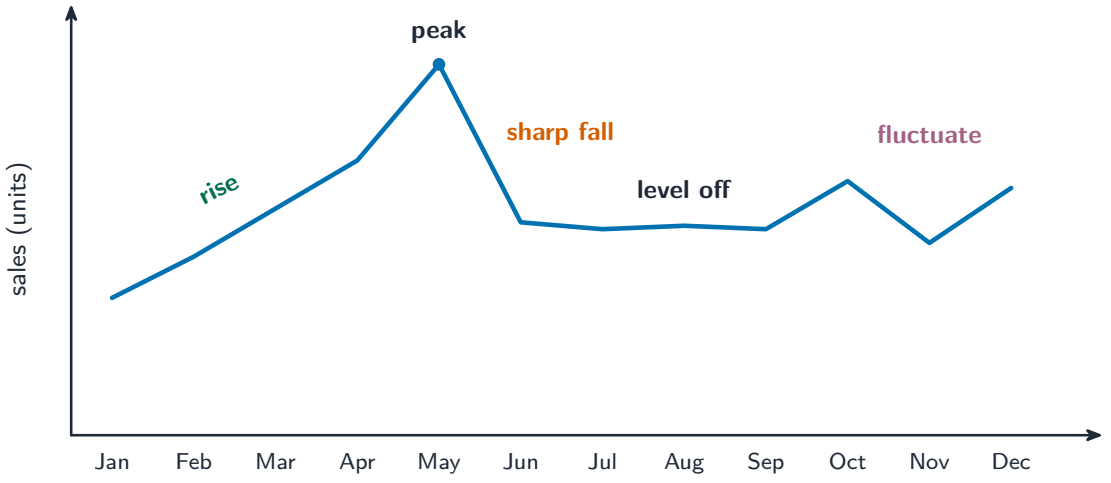
Numbers: say them, hear them

Written	Said
£2.50	*two pounds fifty*
€1,200	*one thousand two hundred euros* (or *twelve hundred euros*)
3.5%	*three point five per cent*
¥2.4m	*two point four million yuan*
15 / 50	*fif-**TEEN** / **FIF**-ty*
3/6 (date)	British: *the third of June*; American: *March sixth*

- The **decimal point** is said *point*: 0.75 = *nought point seven five* or *zero point seven five*.
- In British English say *and* after *hundred*: *three hundred **and** twenty*.
- On the phone, when a number matters, **check**: *"Was that one-five or five-zero?"*

Trends: describing changes in figures

Higher Writing Part 1, Preliminary Reading Part 3 and many Listening tasks ask you to describe or understand a graph.



One line, five trend words

Up	Down	No change	Other
rise, increase, grow, go up	*fall, drop, decrease, go down*	*stay the same, remain stable*	*reach a* ***peak***
a sharp rise (fast)	*a slight fall* (small)	***level off*** (stop changing)	***fluctuate*** (go up and down)

- Verb + adverb: *Sales* ***rose sharply****.* Adjective + noun: *There was a* ***sharp rise*** *in sales.* Use both for range.
- Prepositions: rose **by** 10% (the change); rose **to** 2,000 (the new level); **from** 1,800 **to** 2,000.

Phone calls and meetings

Phone stage	Phrases
Start	*Hello, this is Maria from Greenpack. I'm calling about…*
Ask for someone	*Could I speak to Mr Liu, please?*
Take a message	*I'm afraid she's in a meeting. Can I take a message?*
Check	*Could you spell that, please?* · *Let me read that back to you.*
End	*I'll send you an email to confirm.*

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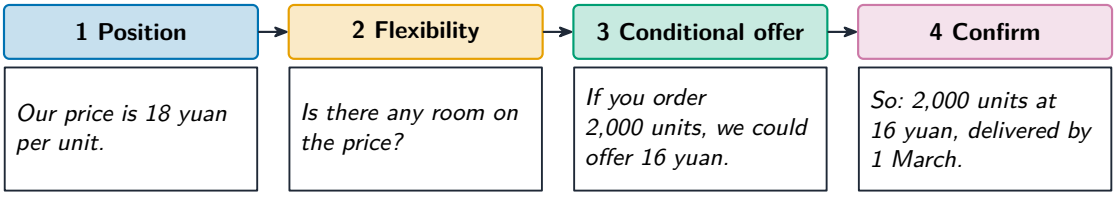
Meeting job	Phrases
Open	*The aim of today's meeting is to…*
Ask for opinions	*What do you think, Anna?*
Interrupt politely	*Sorry to interrupt, but…*
Keep to the point	*Can we move on to the next item?*
Close	*So, to sum up, we've agreed to…*

- Every meeting follows an **agenda** : the list of items to discuss. Many Listening tasks follow one item at a time.

Negotiating

To **negotiate** is to discuss until both sides agree on a deal: a price, a quantity, a date.



Position, flexibility, conditional offer, confirm

- The key structure is the **conditional offer** : ***If*** *you…*, ***we could…*** You give something only **in return** for something.
- Soft language keeps the talk friendly: *I'm afraid that's a little high for us* rather than *That's too expensive.*
- Before you finish, **confirm** every detail: price, quantity, delivery date, payment.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Direct requests that sound rude.** *I want you to send the report* sounds like an order. Use *Could you…?* or *Would you mind…?*
- △ **Big numbers.** Chinese counts in (ten thousand); English counts in thousands and millions. 3 = *thirty thousand*; 100 = *one million.*
- △ **"Increase" for everything.** Use the range: *rise sharply*, *grow steadily*, *reach a peak*, *level off.*
- △ **Saying "yes" too fast in a negotiation.** *Yes* can sound like agreement. Say *I see* or *I understand* if you mean only that you heard.

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. Make it formal: *Can you get back to me by Friday?*
2. Say this number: **2.75%**.
3. How do you say 50 yuan in English?
4. Complete: *Sales rose ____ 15% ____ 4,600 units.*
5. Make a conditional offer: you will give 5% off for payment within 10 days.
6. Which ending goes with *Dear Sir or Madam*?

Answers. 1 *I would be grateful if you could reply by Friday.* 2 *two point seven five per cent.* 3 *five hundred thousand yuan.* 4 **by**, **to**. 5 *If you pay within 10 days, we could offer you 5% off.* 6 *Yours faithfully.*

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. Which register for a complaint from a new customer? – **Formal**.
2. What does *level off* mean? – The figure **stops changing** after rising or falling.
3. What is the difference between *rose by* and *rose to*? – **by** gives the change; **to** gives the new level.
4. What is the most useful structure in negotiating? – The **conditional offer**: *If you…, we could…*
5. What should you do at the end of a negotiation or phone call? – **Confirm** every detail.

Vocabulary card meanings

contraction: A short form of words, such as I'm for I am. phrasal verb: A verb with a small word such as up or off that has its own meaning, like put off. decimal point: The dot in a number such as 2.5, said as point. peak: The highest point of something before it falls. level off: To stop rising or falling and stay about the same. fluctuate: To go up and down again and again. agenda: The list of items to discuss in a meeting. negotiate: To discuss something until both sides agree. conditional offer: An offer that you make only if the other side does something in return.

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