



The Oxford Online Placement Test

What is the Oxford Online Placement Test?

The Oxford Online Placement Test measures a test taker's ability to communicate in English. It gives you the information you need to find out about a person's language level.

By using this test, you can concentrate more on using the information it provides, and less on the time-consuming process of administering the test and marking it.

The test:

- is online, allowing test takers to take it anywhere; at home, at school, in the office, and under examination conditions if you choose.
- is easy to manage using a Learning Management System that does what you need in a few straightforward steps.
- is testing more than just grammar and vocabulary. It also tests a person's understanding of meaning when communicating in English.
- is reliable (consistently grading test takers at the right level) and valid (having a strong theoretical basis and having been through a rigorous test design, pretesting and piloting stage).
- is computer-adaptive, making the test shorter yet still accurate.
- is automatically marked with instant results.
- reports scores calibrated to the CEF but also allows you to add your own score interpretation if you so wish.
- provides easy to use online tools to help you put test takers into classes or groups according to their level.

This document describes the key features of the Oxford Online Placement Test and how it can be of benefit to your organisation.

What exactly does the test measure?

The Oxford Online Placement Test is designed to measure a test taker's ability to understand a range of grammatical forms and the meanings they convey in a wide range of contexts. It also measures the extent to which learners can use these language resources to communicate in English language situations.

The test has been designed with a number of key considerations in mind:

- the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF)¹ Can Do language descriptors.
- current thinking on the nature of communicative language ability.
- current thinking on how foreign languages are learned.
- the grammar and vocabulary included in Oxford University Press ELT coursebooks.
- the types of errors that language learners typically make as they progress towards native-like ability to communicate in another language.

For a more detailed consideration of these test design issues, please see the paper "The Oxford Online Placement Test: What is it measuring and how?" by Professor James Purpura of Columbia University, New York. This is available on the **Information for Teachers** page of oxfordenglishtesting.com

Professor Purpura has led the research and design team working on the test development project. He is a prominent figure in the field of language assessment, having written and lectured widely on the subject. His book, *Assessing Grammar* (CUP, 2004) is of particular relevance to the development of the Oxford Online Placement Test.

¹ For more information about the CEF see http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

How does the Oxford Online Placement Test work?

The Oxford Online Placement Test is a computer adaptive test. This means that it adapts to the ability level of each test taker, and only presents the test taker with questions that are at his or her appropriate level of difficulty. It does this by estimating the ability of each test taker after they have answered each question and then selecting the most suitable next item for them to attempt. By using an adaptive test delivery format, the Oxford Online Placement Test can be much shorter than a conventional, pencil-and-paper placement test since each test taker only answers questions relevant to his or her level of language ability.

Using this computer adaptive approach, each test taker is taking a test that is uniquely designed to measure his or her ability level within a certain domain (e.g., knowledge of grammatical forms). Crucially, the difficulty level of these items has already been determined through pretesting involving thousands of students from around the world and through prior statistical analyses. In this way, items can be precisely matched up with test takers' abilities.

What task types are used?

The test currently has two sections:

- Use of English (with around 30 questions)
- Listening (with around 15 questions)

Use of English

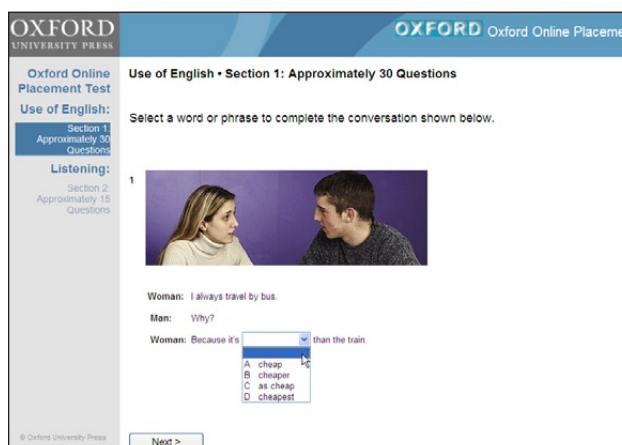
The Use of English Section is designed to measure how much learners know about grammatical forms and the meanings (e.g. word meanings, phrasal meanings, sentence meanings) that these forms encode. It currently consists of three task types. A fourth task type (testing knowledge of pragmatic meaning) will appear towards the end of 2009.

To help put dialogues into context, each question is illustrated by an image – in the form of a photograph.

Task 1 – Testing knowledge of grammatical forms

Task 1 is designed to measure the test takers' knowledge of grammar. In this task, test takers are asked to read a short gapped dialogue and then complete the dialogue by selecting one of four options. An example is shown below.

Example: Testing knowledge of grammatical forms at the A2 level (elementary)



The screenshot shows the Oxford Online Placement Test interface. On the left, there is a navigation menu with 'Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions' selected under 'Use of English'. The main area displays 'Use of English • Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions' and the instruction 'Select a word or phrase to complete the conversation shown below.' Below this is a photograph of a woman and a man. The dialogue is as follows: Woman: I always travel by bus. Man: Why? Woman: Because it's [gap] than the train. A dropdown menu is open over the gap, showing four options: A. cheap, B. cheaper, C. as cheap, and D. cheapest. A 'Next >' button is at the bottom.

This item tests the learners' knowledge of the comparative form.

Task 2 – Testing knowledge of meaning

Task 2 is designed to measure the test takers' ability to use grammatical forms in order to understand the meanings communicated in a short, minimally-contextualized exchange. The meanings vary on a scale from very explicit, where the meaning can be determined from the words in the sentence, to very implicit (also referred to as "implied"), where the meaning of the exchange can only be determined from the context. Being able to understand not only the words of an exchange, but also their collective meaning(s) as intended by the speaker in context, is a critical feature of being able to communicate in a language.

Example: Testing knowledge of literal meaning at the A2 level (elementary)

This item tests the learners' understanding of literal meaning. Here the statement "What's Ben like?" has the same literal meaning as "What do you think of Ben?"

Oxford Online Placement Test
Use of English • Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions

Read the dialogue. Then, select the correct answer from the options below.

2 What does the man mean?

- A What does Ben like?
- B What would Ben like?
- C What do you think of Ben?

Man: What's Ben like?
Woman: He's nice.

Next >

Example: Testing knowledge of intended meaning at the B1 level (pre-intermediate)

In this example, the woman is responding to an offer made by the man. In saying "I'd love that, but ..." she is refusing his offer politely rather than saying "No" directly.

Oxford Online Placement Test
Use of English • Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions

Read the dialogue. Then, select the correct answer from the options below.

3 This woman is ...

- A accepting an offer.
- B refusing an offer.
- C making an offer.

Man: Can I take you out for dinner on Saturday?
Woman: I'd love that, but I'm actually going away for the weekend.

Next >

Example: Testing knowledge of implied meaning at the A2 level (elementary)

In this example, the woman asks the man if she can speak to him. He agrees, but says he only has five minutes, thereby implying that the conversation needs to be limited to five minutes. In the dialogue, he only says, "Well, I have to leave in five minutes." His meaning in this context is that he can speak to the woman, but this meaning is implied rather than explicitly stated. By mentioning when he needs to leave, he wishes to communicate the following: "Yes let's talk, but I can only do so for five minutes."

Oxford Online Placement Test
Use of English • Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions

Read the dialogue. Then, select the correct answer from the options below.

4 What does the man mean?

- A I don't like talking to you
- B I'll talk to you in five minutes.
- C I don't have very long to talk to you

Woman: Can I talk to you?
Man: Well, I have to leave in five minutes.

Next >

Task 3 – Testing knowledge of form and meaning

Task 3 is designed to test whether test takers can understand a long passage with gaps and whether they have sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to complete these gaps correctly. In other words, this task type was designed to measure the test takers' knowledge of both grammatical form and meaning. Test takers from the A1 (beginner) to B2 levels (intermediate) of proficiency are asked to fill in only one word; those from the C1 to the C2 levels (upper-intermediate to advanced) are asked to supply more words.

Example:

Testing knowledge of grammatical form and meaning across a passage at the A1 level (beginner)

The screenshot shows the Oxford Online Placement Test interface. The header includes the Oxford University Press logo and 'OXFORD Oxford Online Placement Test'. The left sidebar lists 'Oxford Online Placement Test Use of English: Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions' and 'Listening: Section 2: Approximately 15 Questions'. The main content area is titled 'Use of English • Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions' and contains the instruction: 'Complete the text below. Write **ONE** word only into each space. There is an example (0) at the beginning.'

The text to be completed is a letter from Hugo to Tim Smith:

Hil I'm having a great time (0) in Rome. It's hot and sunny and the people 5 very friendly. Yesterday, we 6 to the Coliseum. It was very old 7 really interesting. This afternoon we're going shopping in the local markets. Tomorrow we're 8 to leave Rome in 9 morning and travel 10 train to Venice. We've got some friends there. They're going to take 11 to St Mark's Square. I'd also like a trip on a gondola! See you soon
Love Hugo.

To the right of the text is a postcard address label with a stamp of two red roses. The address is: Tim Smith, 101A Wentworth Road, Wimbledon, London W1 2NQ.

The correct answer in gap 1 is “are/seem/appear”. In this case the learners need to determine what word would meaningfully complete the idea being expressed by the writer. The learners must also know that the verb should be in the present tense and given the subject “people”, the verb would require a plural form. Given these two dimensions, we say this item measures both form and meaning.

Listening

The Listening Section of the test is designed to present test takers with different types of listening passages. They will need to identify the literal, intended, and implied meanings being communicated in what they hear. In other words, test takers need to understand what is said (literal meaning) in the passage, what is understood “between the lines” (intended meaning), and what is communicated “beyond the lines”, drawing on the individual, social, cultural, affective, or attitudinal meanings of the situation.

The Listening Section contains three task types. The first presents test takers with a number of short dialogues, each followed by a single four-option multiple-choice question. The second task type presents test takers with a longer dialogue; the third with a monologue. After test takers listen, they are asked to answer one or two four-option multiple-choice questions. Test takers are given approximately 15 listening questions, depending on their level. They may listen to each recording twice.

Example: Understanding literal meaning at the B1 level (pre-intermediate)

When they click the “play” button, test takers hear:

Man: We went to that new Italian restaurant the other day.

Woman: What – er... Antonio's?

Man: Yeah.

Woman: What's it like?

Man: It's good – I had some really nice pasta. The waiter wasn't that great, but it was all pretty cheap.

Woman: Was it busy?

Man: No, hardly anybody there. It was really quiet.

In this example, the man says “I had some really nice pasta.”. The literal and intended meaning of the man's opinion was that the “food was good”. Test takers are able to derive this meaning from what has been explicitly said in the audio.

The screenshot shows the Oxford Online Placement Test interface. At the top, it says "OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS" and "OXFORD Oxford Online Placement Test". On the left, there is a sidebar with "Oxford Online Placement Test" and "Use of English: Section 1: Approximately 30 Questions" and "Listening: Section 2: Approximately 15 Questions". The main content area is titled "Listening • Section 2: Approximately 15 Questions" and contains the instruction: "Read the sentences below. Then, listen to the short conversation. Select the correct answer from the options below. You will have time to play the recording twice." Below this is a audio player with a play button and a progress bar. The question is: "12 A man is talking about a restaurant he went to. What does he say about it?" The options are: A The meal was expensive. B The service was quick. C The place was noisy. D The food was good. At the bottom, there is a "Next >" button and a copyright notice "© Oxford University Press".

How do administrators or teachers administer the Oxford Online Placement Test?

You can manage the testing process using the Oxford English Testing's Learning Management System (OLMS). This system provides you with a comprehensive tool set that, for example, allows you to create different groups/classes for testing and then takes you through a simple set of steps for assigning placement tests to these groups. Tests can either be taken in your institution's computer lab with your colleagues overseeing the session, or at the test taker's home. As the OLMS allows you to send multiple emails at the click of a button, you can provide test takers with the URL of the login page along with their unique login and password details so that they can take the test at their convenience.

How long does the Oxford Online Placement Test take?

There is no set time limit for the placement test although teachers may impose one. In this case, they will need to inform test takers at the start of the test. Based on the pretest results, test takers typically finish the placement test in around 30 to 40 minutes. However, it is recommended that test takers be allowed to complete the test in their own time.

The test taker's results show how long he or she has spent on each section of the test. You might want to use this information to place students with similar results into distinct classes when one has completed the test much more quickly than the other.

Scoring the Oxford Online Placement Test

The test is instantly scored and the results displayed in the OLMS. Scores are available for the whole test and for the Use of English and Listening sections. *You can see:*

An overall score and individual section scores showing:

- score on a scale of 0–120 (giving equal weighting to the two sections).
- language proficiency descriptors.
- CEF levels.
- time taken.

Organisation: School of English
Logged in: David Patterson
[Log out](#)

Manage placement results: View results for **June 2009, Oxford Online Placement Test(1)** [back](#) [Help for this page](#)

Move selected students into this class: [move](#) [download](#) [print](#)

Hover over time taken and level for more details.

☐	Last name	First name	Oxford Online Placement Test (1)			Use of English: (1)			Listening: (1)		
			Score	Time taken	CEF	Score	Time taken	CEF	Score	Time taken	CEF
<input type="checkbox"/>	Camarotti	Olivia	61	00:47	B2	98	00:31	C1	23	00:16	A2
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cortez	Eduardo	95	00:40	C1	85	00:26	C1	104	00:14	C2
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dabrowski	Jakub	30	00:53	A2	41	00:35	B1	19	00:18	A1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medici	Roberto	105	00:39	C2	115	00:26	C2	95	00:13	C1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Metaxas	Vasiliki	87	00:42	C1	77	00:28	B2	97	00:14	C1

Basic reporting for the whole test and each section

- Scores on a scale of 0-120
- Time taken
- CEF levels (hover over level to see descriptors)

In addition, you will see:

- information that test takers have provided themselves at the start of the test.
- information that institutions enter.

You can then sort the results by clicking any of the column headings (e.g. by score, CEF, nationality, etc), lock that column and sort by a different column. Then you can select the test takers and move them into their class within the OLMS. You can also download the data in Excel, and print class lists for teachers to use.

Manage placement results: View results for **June 2009, Oxford Online Placement Test(1)** [back](#) [Help for this page](#)

Move selected students into this class

Hover over time taken and level for more details.

	Last name	First name	Gender	Date of birth	First language	Last exam taken	Nationality	Speaking	Score	Time taken	CEF	Score	Time taken
<input type="checkbox"/>	Camarotti	Olivia	F	22/01/1987	Italian	PET	Italian	08	61	00:47	B2	98	00:31
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cortez	Eduardo	M	15/05/1990	Spanish	FCE	Spanish	09	95	00:40	C1	85	00:26
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dabrowski	Jakub	M	04/03/1989	Polish	None	Polish	06	30	00:53	A2	41	00:35
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medici	Roberto	M	28/10/1989	Italian	CAE	Italian	12	105	00:39	C2	115	00:26
<input type="checkbox"/>	Metaxas	Vasiliki	F	19/08/1991	Greek	FCE	Greek	11	87	00:42	C1	77	00:28

Additional reporting

- Standard registration questions**
 - Gender
 - Date of birth
 - First language
- Customisable registration questions, e.g.**
 - Last exam taken
 - Nationality
- Information teachers enter, e.g.**
 - Speaking score

Using the results

The placement test results are reported on a scale of 0–120 with 20 points corresponding to each CEF level (e.g., a score of 15 would correspond to the CEF A1 level). For detailed information on how to use placement test scores and on what analyses this score interpretation is based, please see the paper “The Oxford Online Placement Test: Score Interpretation” by Alastair Pollitt. This is available on the **Information for Teachers** page of oxfordenglishtesting.com

Alastair Pollitt is a member of the UK OFQUAL Advisory Committee, a visiting fellow at Cambridge University’s Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics, and is internationally recognised in the field of educational measurement.

Reliability and validity

The Oxford Online Placement Test has been developed to measure test takers’ communicative language ability so that the scores from the test can be used to make accurate placement decisions in a language programme.

The validation process for the design phase of the Oxford Online Placement Test began with an extensive programme of research. The initial phases involved an analysis to determine what content might need to appear on the test from A1 to C2. Further item and test analyses were performed based on a pretesting stage that involved approximately 10,000 students from 42 countries. In examining claims of the quality of the test, the statistical characteristics of the items, the measures, and the pretest forms were investigated from a number of approaches. You can find more information on reliability and validity in the papers by Alastair Pollitt and Professor James Purpura, available on the **Information for Teachers** page of oxfordenglishtesting.com.