Pearson

Readiness Test

Test Specification & Validation Report

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Contents

Version History

Version	Document Title	Author	Reviewer	Date	Changes
1.0	International Certificate Readiness Test Specification and Validation Report	Ben Cook		16/10/20	Baseline version created with document control. This is a legacy document. This version was created on 16/10/20, and was approved by David Booth
1.1	Benchmark Test Validation & Specification Report		Gustavo Belardinelli	21/10/2025	Formatting and branding updated. No changes made to content.

Introduction

Readiness Test: An overview

The Pearson English International Certificate Readiness Test is an online assessment of English language proficiency for individuals and groups of test takers. It is designed to assess a candidate's readiness to take the Pearson English International Certificate Exam (PEIC) – either the paper or computer-based version. The test measures a student's English language competency and reports a 'readiness' status at the overall and skill level. There are 4 tests – one each at CEFR levels A2, B1, B2 and C1.

The test score report provides the overall test readiness status, supplemented with skill statuses, performance summaries, and recommendations for future study. Suggested activities are also included for a range of Pearson courseware titles. Results can be reported at both the group and individual level. The assessment is delivered digitally through the Pearson English Test Hub, which also stores and displays the results of the test.

The purpose of the test

The test is designed to be used by test takers intending to take the paper or computer-based versions of the Pearson English International Certificate (PEIC). It provides information to a test taker on their readiness to take this test by indicating the likelihood of them passing the test at the desired level. Teachers also have access to group reports, to help them understand if their class of students is ready to attempt the PEIC.

The information provided includes:

- An overall readiness status (Ready, Potentially Ready, Not Ready)
- A profile of sub-skill scores, which show the strengths and weaknesses for each test taker (Ready, Potentially Ready, Not Ready)
- Performance summaries, recommendations for further study, and links to Pearson courseware.

The group report also includes:

- A profile of overall and sub-skill scores for a group showing strengths or weaknesses (Ready, Potentially Ready, Not Ready).

As well as indicating readiness, the test score reports can be used by test takers and teachers to inform their learning and test preparation plans.

Who is it for?

The test is designed for secondary and adult learners who are aged 14 or older, planning to take the Pearson English International Certificate (PEIC) General Test.

Why take an integrated skills test?

Some of the questions Readiness Test test a single skill, such as speaking or writing. When assessing these skills, we test traits such as pronunciation and fluency, the ability to argue, as well as written conventions, along with grammar and vocabulary.

A number of the questions on the test are integrated skills questions. These questions test more than one skill at the same time. Using integrated skills questions means that the Readiness Test is a better test of a learner's English. In real life and in the classroom, learners use more than one skill to complete communicative tasks. To order something in a restaurant, we need to listen and speak, and to take notes in a classroom, we need to listen and write. Integrated skills questions test how well learners can use the skills they have learnt and practised in the classroom and used in real life. On a practical level, integrated skills also means that the test length can be reduced, which is of benefit to the teacher.

Test Design

The Readiness Test is designed specifically to measure language proficiency. The test construct is based on actionable learner outcomes as embodied in can-do statements in the Common European Framework of Languages and the Global Scale of English General learning objectives. It is built on the body of applied linguistic research of the last 50 years, which prioritises the ability to use language in context rather than just knowledge of the language. In order to use language effectively, it is assumed that learners require certain knowledge of the systems of language, such as grammar, vocabulary and phonemic systems.

The test explicitly measures language as a unitary trait. It also provides a breakdown of sub-skills for the convenience of users to provide some insights into the relative strengths and weaknesses of test takers.

The test suite contains 4 tests: Test A2, Test B1, Test B2 and Test C1. The tests use fixed, linear forms. The total time of the test is approximately 60 minutes, although this may vary slightly according to level. Each test has three parts:

Part 1 - Part 1 tests Reading. There are 2 item types in this section.

Part 2 - Part 2 assesses Speaking and Listening. There are 7 item types in this section.

Part 3 - Part 3 assesses Writing. There are 2 item types in this section.

Test items are primarily integrated skills. Speaking and writing items utilise automated scoring technologies, described below.

Common European Framework levels

The following table contains the summary descriptors published in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24). These descriptors informed the development of the test items as well as the descriptors used in the score reports.

A2 The capabilities of learners at Level A2 have been summarised in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, Table 1, p. 24) as follows:..	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
B1 The capabilities of learners at Level B1 have been summarised in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, Table 1, p. 24) as follows:	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.

	Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
B2 The capabilities of learners at Level B2 have been summarised in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, Table 1, p. 24) as follows:.	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with proficient speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
C1 The capabilities of learners at Level C1 have been summarised in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, Table 1, p. 24) as follows:	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

Test Development

The questions in the Readiness Test have been developed by international teams of writers based in the UK, USA, Hong Kong, and Australia.

Once written, all questions are reviewed by the teams in the different countries. Comments and suggestions for improvement are stored with the test questions on a secure database. The questions then go through a further review by an expert panel, and decisions are made on the quality of the questions, which to keep and which to reject. All questions are then thoroughly checked by Pearson staff, and images and high-quality recordings are added to complete the questions before they go forward to be calibrated in a large-scale field test.

After the field testing, further checks are made on item quality based on the measurement characteristics of the questions. Questions are eliminated from the item pool if they are too easy or too difficult, if weaker learners get them right but stronger learners get them wrong, or if they show any bias. These checks then result in a bank of the best quality questions. Questions are selected from this bank to go into the final tests.

Readiness status validation

To establish the cut scores for the Readiness status at each test level, data from five different sources were used. The first source was a trial of the Readiness test itself, in 5 countries, with students taking the Readiness test and the equivalent PTE General test within 3 months of each other. This data source was supplemented with 4 other data sets, containing alternative but overlapping assessments, all within the same frame of reference. This resulted in over 40,000

test attempts, covering the full CEFR range from A1 to C2, being used to establish the readiness status categories (Ready, Potentially Ready, Not Ready) for all tests.

To verify these categories, the pass/fail/merit/distinction outcome of a set of PTE General candidates was compared with their Readiness test status. The analysis showed that none of the candidates labeled as 'Ready' failed the PTEG exam. 27% of candidates labelled as 'Not Ready' in the Readiness Test went on to pass the PTE General exam. This can be explained by the time between taking the Readiness test and the actual exam, and the additional work and preparation that candidates did.

Automated scoring validation process

To validate the automated scoring of speaking and writing items, 300 candidates were randomly selected as the validation data set. A validation data set is a group of candidates whose data are segregated out prior to psychometric analysis in order to independently test how well automated scoring models work, once they are complete. Additionally, these candidates' data were not included in the psychometric item calibration or in the scaling onto the GSE. If the test scores for these candidates, as calculated by both automated and human scoring models, are highly correlated, this provides evidence that the automated scoring models will work as expected for other new candidates in the operational setting.

Once the automated scoring system was developed, the responses from the validation set were run through the same psychometric model to produce an Overall and six skill scores for each candidate. Those human and machine scores were then correlated to compare how similar those two kinds of scores are for each person. When candidates were identified as having extreme scores (i.e., well outside the reported score range of the GSE and not well estimated), or when they had fewer than five responses which were able to be scored in a skill area, their scores were excluded from the analyses. This reduced the n-count for the Overall score correlation to 288 candidates. The relationship between machine and human Overall scores was found to be a very strong one with a correlation of .97 (see Table 1).

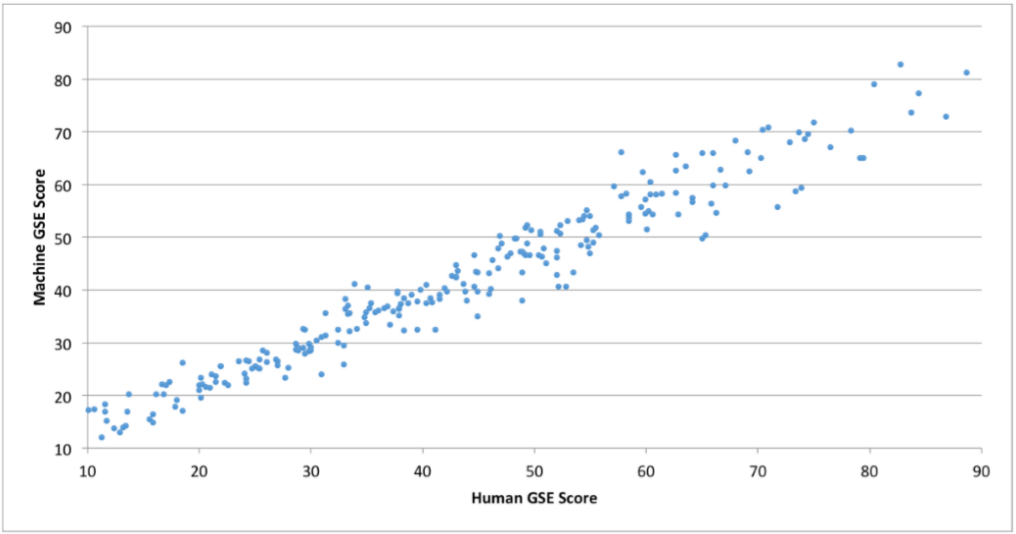
Table 1. Correlations between scores using machine and human scoring methods for Overall and skill reporting areas.

Score Type	Correlation
Overall	.97
Listening	.93
Speaking	.83
Reading	.90
Writing	.99

Grammar	.97
Vocabulary	.93

Machine scoring produces scores that are nearly identical to those that a careful human rating process for many item types would require (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Scatter plot of GSE scaled scores for validation set candidates using human and machine scoring methods.



Test reporting

Test takers completing the Readiness Test are provided with a score report, providing detailed feedback for teachers and students and helping advise future learning. The report contains the overall and skill readiness statuses, performance summaries, recommendations, and courseware activities (where relevant).

The overall and skill statuses are reported as follows:

- **Ready** – very likely to pass the PEIC exam at that level
- **Potentially Ready** – could pass the PEIC exam at that level, but will need to work on the areas identified in the score report
- **Not Ready** – unlikely to pass, and recommend further study before taking the PEIC exam

Using a Readiness Test assessment map, based on Pearson assessment frameworks, item types and test content, the score report provides test-specific performance summaries for each skill at different CEFR levels. These describe what the test taker can do, based on their test responses. The performance summaries link to recommendations, which state what test takers need to do to improve i.e. to pass the corresponding PEIC/PTE General exam. Recommendations are course agnostic, but a range of Pearson courseware titles are available to provide links to specific activities.

Enabling skills (Vocabulary, Grammar) are reported on in the performance summaries and recommendations where relevant, but are not given a status.

The Readiness Test is a formative assessment and is not taken at a secure test centre. Therefore, the test result is not for certification of the test taker's English proficiency level, but to support the test taker's learning.

Test Questions

What kinds of questions are in the test and what do they measure?

There are a number of question types in the test, taken from the computer-based version of PEIC. The variety of question types allows test takers to demonstrate their English ability in different ways. There are questions where learners choose the correct option or where they write the answer to an open question. There are questions where the learner repeats what has been said, as well as questions where learners describe something or write a short essay. Not all question types appear at all levels, with more graphical-based items at the lower levels to reduce cognitive load.

Reading questions

There are three reading question types. Reading is also tested as part of Read Aloud, Recall a passage, and Listen and Read, which are all Integrated Skills questions.

Item type	What do the learners have to do?	What is being tested?
Choose the Right Picture.	This question asks learners to read a short text and select the best picture to match with the text.	This question tests the global understanding of short messages, notes and short pieces of writing.
Short Answer Questions	This question asks the learner to read a longer text and answer questions on the text.	This question tests the reading comprehension of the learner. It tests specific information included in the text.
Choose the Right Word or Phrase (gapfill)	This question asks learners to read a short text and select the best word or phrase to complete the text.	This question tests the global understanding of short messages, notes and short pieces of writing.

Listening questions

Listening is tested as part of Listen and Repeat, Listen to the conversation, Listen and Write (Dictation), and Listen and Read (Hotspots), which are all Integrated Skills questions.

Speaking questions

There is one speaking question type which tests only speaking. Speaking is also tested as part of Read Aloud, Listen and Repeat, and Listen to the conversation, which are Integrated Skills questions.

Item type	What do the learners have to do?	What is being tested?
Describe Image	This question asks the learner to look at a photograph or picture and describe what they see.	This question tests the learner's ability to speak in an extended way linking concepts and ideas. It tests the accuracy of speech including accurate grammar, pronunciation and stress as well as the fluency of the speech. It tests the use of appropriate words to describe the photograph or picture.

Writing questions

There is one question type which tests only writing. Writing is also tested as part of Listen and Write and Recall a passage which are Integrated Skills questions.

Item type	What do the learners have to do?	What is being tested?
Short Writing Task	This question asks the learner to write a short essay in response to a prompt. For lower levels, test takers need to write a short description of an image.	This question tests global writing skills. It tests paragraph and sentence structure, the range and accuracy of the language used, the ability to structure an argument or discussion in a written context. It tests grammar and vocabulary as an essential part of writing.

Integrated skills questions

There are six question types which measure more than one skill at the same time. These are called Integrated Skills Questions.

Item type	What do the learners have to do?	What is being tested?
Read Aloud	This question asks the learner to read aloud a sentence or short text.	This question tests accurate pronunciation and how fluent the learner is at speaking. It tests if the words in the text are understood and repeated accurately.
Listen and then Write (Dictation)	This question asks the learner to listen to a sentence or short text and write what they have heard.	This question tests listening comprehension at the word and sentence level. It tests the ability to write accurately and understand sentence structure, word order and connectors.

Listen and Repeat	This question asks the learner to listen to a sentence or short text and then repeat it	This question tests listening comprehension at the word and sentence level. It tests pronunciation and fluency. It tests if the words heard are understood and repeated accurately.
Read and then Write	This question asks the learners to read a short story or short piece of factual text. The text then disappears and the learner has to reconstruct the text.	This question tests reading comprehension. It tests the ability to write accurately and understand sentence structure, word order and connectors.
Listen and Read (Hotspots)	This question asks the learner to read a text and at the same time listen to the text. The learner has to find the differences between the written text and the spoken text.	This question tests reading and listening comprehension. It tests the ability to recognise individual words in a text.
Listen to the Conversation	This question asks the learner to listen to a short conversation and then answer a question about the conversation.	This question tests listening comprehension. It tests the accuracy of the listening comprehension of the learner.

Question type and level

Most questions are used across all 4 levels of the test. However, some questions are more appropriate for students at lower or higher levels of proficiency. The table below shows question types in relation to the four different test levels.

	Item Type	Skills Covered	Test Level			
			A2	B1	B2	C1
Part	Choose the Right Picture	Reading				
	Short Answer Questions	Reading				
	Choose the Right Word or Phrase	Reading				
Part 2	Read Aloud	Speaking & Reading				
	Listen and Repeat	Listening & Speaking				
	Describe a Picture	Speaking				
	Listen to the Conversation	Listening & Speaking				

	Listen and Read (Hotspots)	Listening & Reading				
	Listen and Write (Dictation)	Listening & Writing				
Part 3	Recall a Passage	Reading & Writing				
	Short Writing Task (Essay or Describe an image)	Writing				

Sample test

Users can attempt the unscored sample test to familiarise themselves with the question types in the test. The sample tests contain an example of all the item types users will attempt in the scored test, and there is a separate sample test for each level. Test takers should attempt the sample test before taking the scored test, but they do not need to write full answers. The sample test is not timed, but will take 5-10 minutes to complete.