



ECPE 2014

Report

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1. DESCRIPTION OF THE TEST

1.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE) is a standardized advanced level English as a foreign language examination designed by CaMLA. It is a test of general language proficiency in a variety of contexts. The four component skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking are evaluated through a combination of tasks.

The ECPE is aimed at the C2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) and is valid for the lifetime of the recipient. An ECPE certificate is recognized in several countries as official documentary evidence of advanced proficiency in English for academic and professional purposes. It is accepted by some universities as evidence of proficiency in English if the certificate has been received within the past two years.

CaMLA is committed to the excellence of its tests, which are developed in accordance with the highest standards in educational measurement. All parts of the examination are written following specified guidelines, and items are pretested to ensure that they function properly. CaMLA works closely with test centers to ensure that its tests are administered in a way that is fair and accessible to test takers and that the ECPE is open to all people who wish to take the exam, regardless of the school they attend or their participation in formal language study.

1.2 TEST FORMAT

The ECPE tests all four skill areas: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Table 1 describes the format and content of the ECPE. Test preparation resources are available on the CaMLA website.

Table 1: Format and Content of the ECPE

Section	Time	Description	Number Of Items
Speaking	30–35 minutes	Test takers participate in a semistructured, multistage task involving two examinees and two examiners.	1 task
Writing	30 minutes	Test takers write an essay based upon one of two topic choices.	1 task
Listening	35–40 minutes	<p>Part 1 (multiple choice) A short recorded conversation is accompanied by three printed statements. Test takers choose the statement that conveys the same meaning as what was heard, or that is true based upon the conversation.</p> <p>Part 2 (multiple choice) A recorded question is accompanied by three printed responses. Test takers choose the appropriate response to the question.</p> <p>Part 3 (multiple choice) Three recorded talks, such as those that might be heard on the radio, are each followed by recorded comprehension questions. The questions and the answer choices are printed in the test booklet. Test takers choose the correct answer from the choices.</p>	50
Grammar	75 minutes	Grammar (multiple choice) An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of words or phrases to complete it. Only one choice is grammatically correct.	40
Cloze		Cloze (multiple choice) Two passages with 10 deletions each are followed by choices of words and phrases to complete the text. Test takers must choose the option that best fills each blank in terms of grammar and meaning.	20
Vocabulary		Vocabulary (multiple choice) An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of words to complete it. Only one word has the correct meaning in that context.	40
Reading		Reading (multiple choice) Four reading passages are followed by comprehension questions. Test takers choose the correct answer from the printed answer choices.	20

2. SCORING AND REPORTING OF RESULTS

2.1 EXPLANATION OF SCORING

The speaking and writing sections are graded according to scales established by CaMLA (see our website for the rating scales). The speaking section is conducted and assessed by two CaMLA certified speaking examiners, and the writing section is assessed by at least two CaMLA certified raters.

The listening and grammar, cloze, vocabulary, and reading (GCVR) sections of the ECPE are scored by computer at CaMLA. Each correct answer contributes proportionally to the final score for each section, and there are no points deducted for wrong answers. A scaled score is calculated using an advanced mathematical model based on Item Response Theory. This method ensures that the ability required to pass a section, or to receive a high score, remains the same from year to year.

In November 2014, CaMLA introduced an enhanced scoring system for the ECPE. Before November 2014, the writing and speaking sections were scored using a holistic approach to rating. As of November 2014, the writing and speaking sections are scored using an analytic approach. The criteria for awarding an overall pass score were also changed. Prior to November 2014 test takers were awarded an ECPE certificate if they passed three sections of the exam with a Low Pass or higher and received no less than a Borderline Fail in one section. Starting with the November 2014 administration, test takers will be awarded an ECPE certificate if they had an average scaled score of 650 or higher. The information presented in Section 2.2 reflects the procedures for reporting scores after the introduction of the enhanced scoring system.

2.2 PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING SCORES

All test takers receive an Examination Report that provides the following information:

- The result for the ECPE (Honors/Pass/Fail).
- Section results with a brief description of the test taker's performance.

ECPE section scores are reported in five bands. The score report also provides a numeric score for each section.

Table 2: ECPE Performance Range

Score Band	Scaled Score
Honors (H)	840–1000
Pass (P)	750–835
Low Pass (LP)	650–745
Borderline Fail (BF)	610–645
Fail (F)	0–605

Test takers are given these results so that they will know the areas in which they have done well and in which they need to improve. The numeric score provides test takers with more precise information on their performance. For example, a test taker who receives a band score of Pass (P) in the listening section of the ECPE will be able to see if his or her score is at the top of the band—close to an Honors (H)—or if it is closer to a Low Pass (LP).

3. INTERPRETING ECPE RESULTS

The ECPE is aimed at the C2 level of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). Language users at this proficiency level:

Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express [themselves] spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

(Council of Europe, 2001: 24)

Therefore, ECPE certificate holders are expected to be comfortable engaging with abstract ideas and concepts. They are interactive oral English speakers; they contribute to the development of discussion, can generally understand conversational questions, can grasp both the gist and details of a conversation delivered in Standard American English, and can understand extended spoken discourse. They should also have a wide-ranging and flexible vocabulary as well as a sound grasp of English grammar. They can understand written materials that are encountered in both general and specialized professional contexts as well as in university-level reading. Additionally, they were able to communicate in standard written English with good expression and accuracy.

When interpreting an ECPE score report, it is important to remember that the ECPE estimates the test takers' true proficiency by approximating the kinds of tasks that they may encounter in real life. Also, temporary factors unrelated to a test takers' proficiency, such as fatigue, anxiety, or illness, may affect exam results.

When using test scores for decision-making, check the date the test was taken. While the certificate is valid for the holder's lifetime, language ability changes over time. This ability can improve with active use and further study of the language, or it may diminish if the holder does not continue to study or use English on a regular basis. It is also important to remember that test performance is only one aspect to be considered. Communicative language ability consists of both

knowledge of language and knowledge of the world. Therefore, one would need to consider how factors other than language affect how well someone can communicate. For example, in the general context of using English in business, the ability to function effectively involves not only knowledge of English, but also other knowledge and skills such as intellectual knowledge and business skills.

4. TEST-TAKING POPULATION

This section presents an overview of the test takers who took the ECPE in 2014, providing demographic information for the test population. Every test taker completed a registration form which asked for their gender, date of birth, first language, and purpose for taking the exam. Cases where information was not given or was not correctly given were treated as missing data.

Table 3 lists the first language backgrounds of the test takers. The test takers represented 33 different first language backgrounds, but it should be noted that the test population primarily consisted of test takers whose first language was Albanian, Arabic, Greek, Portuguese, or Spanish.

Table 3: List of Test Takers by First Language Background

Albanian	Dutch	Malayalam
Amharic	English	Marathi
Arabic	French	Polish
Armenian	Georgian	Portuguese
Bambara/Malinke	German	Romanian
Bulgarian	Greek	Russian
Cambodian	Hebrew	Spanish
Catalan	Hindi	Thai
Chinese	Italian	Turkish
(Cantonese/Mandarin)	Latvian	Ukrainian
Croatian	Lithuanian	Vietnamese
Czech		

Tables 4 and 5 present the distribution of test takers by age and gender, respectively. Table 4 shows that the majority of the ECPE test takers were under 20 years old (65.88%), with a sizable proportion in the 13 – 16 age group. This suggests that test takers tend to take the ECPE while still in formal schooling and before they attend university. Additionally, Table 5 shows that majority of the test taker who took the ECPE were female. This distribution is similar to previous administrations of the exam.

Table 4: Distribution (in %) of ECPE Test Takers by Age

Age	% of Test Population
≤ 12	0.07
13–16	55.17
17–19	10.64
20–22	12.90
23–25	8.41
26–29	5.32
30–39	4.82
≥ 40	2.55
Missing Data	0.12

Table 5: Distribution (in %) of ECPE Test Takers by Gender

Gender	% of Test Population
Male	39.75
Female	60.15
Missing Data	0.10

Table 6 presents the distribution of test takers by their reported purpose for taking the test. It shows that the largest group of test takers reported that they took the test for employment purposes (33.49%), followed by educational (31.25%), and personal (27.53%). The table also shows that many of the test takers who took the test for educational purposes took it for admission to an educational program, and that many of the test takers who took it for employment purposes took it to improve their employment.

Table 6: Distribution (in %) of ECPE Test Takers by Purpose for Taking the Test

Purpose	% of Test Population
Educational Program Admissions	13.20
Language Course Requirement	12.17
Scholarship	5.88
Obtain Employment	15.74
Improve Employment	17.75
Personal Interest	27.53
Other	2.20
Missing Data	5.52

5. TEST STATISTICS

5.1 DISTRIBUTION OF RESULTS FOR THE EXAM AS A WHOLE

Table 7 shows the percentage of test takers who received an overall Honors, Pass, or Fail for each ECPE administration. It shows that, in 2014, the average pass rate for the ECPE was 69.5%.

Table 7: Percentage of Test Takers Who Received an Overall Honors, Pass, or Fail for the ECPE

Administration	Honors	Pass	Fail
June 2014	0.14	67.36	32.50
November 2014	0.32	71.84	27.84
Overall	0.22	69.27	30.51

5.2 DISTRIBUTION OF RESULTS BY SECTION

Table 8 shows the percentage of test takers in each band for every section of the ECPE. The data indicates that a typical ECPE test taker will perform better on the writing and speaking sections and that the listening and GCVR sections are more challenging. Additionally, the table shows that the distribution of scores across the score bands for the writing and speaking sections changed between the June and the November 2014 administrations of the exam. In particular more test takers received 'Pass' and 'Honors' grades. This indicates that the analytic approach to scoring the writing and speaking sections enables examiners to make better distinctions between the passing test takers and to give credit to test takers who have excelled in a particular aspect of their writing or speaking performance.

Table 8: Percentage of Test Takers in Each Band for the Four Sections of the ECPE

Administration	Section	Honors	Pass	Low Pass	Borderline Fail	Fail
June 2014	Writing	0.54	10.97	75.04	13.01	0.45
	Listening	7.19	21.34	37.72	13.05	20.70
	GCVR	13.12	23.78	34.66	10.91	17.52
	Speaking	3.76	22.79	63.42	9.53	0.50
November 2014	Writing	1.37	14.87	60.12	20.87	2.77
	Listening	11.37	17.58	30.57	14.56	25.91
	GCVR	14.08	16.97	31.29	12.61	25.06
	Speaking	5.19	32.66	48.28	10.56	3.32

5.3 RELIABILITY FIGURES FOR LISTENING AND GCVR

Test scores are a numerical measure of a test taker's ability. *Reliability* refers to the consistency of the measurement. In theory, a test taker's test score should be the same each time the test is taken or across different forms of the same test. In practice, even when the test conditions are carefully controlled, an individual's performance on a set of test items will vary from one administration to another due to variation in the items across different forms of the same test or due to variability in individual performance. Among the reasons for this are temporary factors unrelated to a test taker's proficiency, such as fatigue, anxiety, or illness. As a result, test scores always contain a small amount of measurement error. The aim, however, is to keep this error to a minimum. For high-stakes exams such as the ECPE, a reliability figure of 0.80 and above is expected and acceptable. The reliability estimates are calculated in Winsteps using the KR-20 (Kuder-Richardson Formula 20) method. In addition to monitoring reliability, the estimated variability in test taker performance is also monitored through the standard error of measurement (SEM) estimate. The SEM estimates are calculated using the reliability estimates and the scaled scores. Reliability and SEM estimates are obtained for each administration of the ECPE. Table 9 presents the reliability and SEM estimates for the listening and GCVR sections.

Table 9: Reliability and SEM Estimates for the Listening and GCVR Sections

Administration	Section	Reliability	SEM
June 2014	Listening	0.86	37.36
	GCVR	0.93	25.88
November 2014	Listening	0.83	48.66
	GCVR	0.91	37.81

These values demonstrate that the reliability figures for both exam sections are not only above the minimally acceptable value of 0.80 but are consistently near 0.90. Additionally, the SEM estimates as a proportion of the 1000-point scale are very small. These values suggest excellent consistency of measurement for the ECPE listening and GCVR sections.

5.4 RATER AGREEMENT FIGURES FOR WRITING

The raters for the writing section are native speakers of English, all trained and certified according to standards set by CaMLA. Each essay is rated separately by two accredited raters. CaMLA applies stringent criteria in the calculation of the test takers' final score. In June 2014, examiners applied a holistic approach to scoring and gave each test taker a single band score. The final score awarded was the result of exact agreement by the examiners. If the examiners did not reach exact agreement, the essay would be scored by a third, senior evaluator.

In November 2014, examiners applied an analytic approach to scoring and individually gave test takers a score out of five for each of three scoring criteria; a total of 15 possible score points per examiner. Essays would be evaluated by a third rater if the original two raters gave nonadjacent/divergent scores for any of the scoring criteria.

Table 10: Rater Agreement Figures for the Writing Section

Administration	Rater 1 / Rater 2 Agreement (%)	Pass / Fail Agreement (%)
June 2014	74.74	87.54
November 2014	74.85	85.31

CaMLA monitors rater agreement for training purposes. The rater 1/rater 2 agreement for June 2014 represents their exact % agreement. The rater 1/rater 2 agreement for November 2014 represents their agreement within a tolerance of ± 1 (out of a possible 15) score points. The pass/fail agreement is also monitored; that is, the extent to which raters agree on whether an essay should be awarded a passing grade or a failing grade. Table 10 presents these rater agreement figures for the writing section. Both of these rater agreement values are high, which suggests excellent agreement among raters. It also suggests that a very high standard of rater agreement has been maintained in the transition to the analytic approach to scoring. CaMLA also reviews a percentage of essays each year as part of its ongoing quality control processes.

5.5 RATER AGREEMENT FIGURES FOR SPEAKING

The examiners for the speaking test are native or highly proficient nonnative speakers of English who are trained and certified according to standards set by CaMLA. Each speaking performance is rated separately by two accredited examiners. CaMLA applies stringent criteria in the calculation of the test takers' final score. In June 2014, examiners applied a holistic approach to scoring and individually gave each test taker a single band score. They then discussed their individual ratings. The final score awarded was the result of a consensus by the examiners.

In November 2014, examiners applied an analytic approach to scoring and individually gave test takers a score out of five at six marks collection points; a total of 30 possible score points per examiner. The final score awarded was the sum of each examiner's scores.

Table 11: Rater Agreement Figures for the Speaking Section

Administration	Rater 1 / Rater 2 Agreement (%)	Pass / Fail Agreement (%)
June 2014	88.17	94.97
November 2014	85.67	91.48

CaMLA monitors rater agreement for training purposes. The rater 1/rater 2 agreement for June 2014 represents their exact % agreement (before consensus). The rater 1/rater 2 agreement for November 2014 represents their agreement within a tolerance of ± 2 (out of a possible 30) score points. The pass/fail agreement is also monitored; that is, the extent to which raters agree on whether a performance should be awarded a passing grade or a failing grade. Table 11 presents these rater agreement figures for the speaking section. Both of these rater agreement values are high, which suggests excellent agreement among raters. It also suggests that a very high standard of rater agreement has been maintained in the transition to the analytic approach to scoring. It should also be noted that CaMLA expects test centers to record speaking tests in order to facilitate additional monitoring of examiner performance and rater agreement.

6. REFERENCES

Council of Europe (2001) *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : learning, teaching, assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.