

Test Comparisons

Internationally Recognized English Language Exams: How They Map to the Common European Framework (CEFR) Levels

How are tests mapped to the CEFR?

This document shows how the most widely-used English language proficiency tests relate to the CEFR scales, published by the Council of Europe. The methodology for mapping an exam to the CEFR scales essentially involves human judgment: a group of experts are collected together and they make a judgment about where a particular test taker, language sample, or test question fits on the CEFR scale. The larger and more diverse the group of experts, the more accurate the final judgment is likely to be. However, this means that mapping exercises conducted on different occasions and with different human judges might give different results, e.g. one institution might judge that CEFR Level B1 relates to TOEIC 530, and another institution might conclude that Level B1 relates to 570. The most reliable “maps”, therefore, are those which have been refined through two or more iterations of mapping exercises.

How should we interpret the table?

In this document, we have collected together the CEFR mappings that are officially endorsed by each test provider for their own test. In other words, the IELTS mapping was conducted by Cambridge ESOL, the TOEFL and TOEIC mappings were conducted by ETS, and the Versant mapping was conducted by the Knowledge Technologies group of Pearson. In this way we hope to provide the most accurate information. However, note that of these three, only Pearson commissioned an independent academic to conduct the study autonomously (as opposed to conducting the mapping themselves).

It is important to keep in mind that the examinations given here have different designs, purposes, and test methods, e.g., spoken vs. written. Since they assess different constructs (types of language proficiency) it is very difficult to give exact comparisons across different tests and test scores, even when the scores they generate are used for similar purposes¹. Candidates' aptitude and preparation for a particular type of test will also vary from individual to individual (or group to group), and some candidates are more likely to perform better in certain tests than in others.

¹ Please see Cambridge ESOL's Research Notes (2004) Issue 15 for a more complete explanation and cautious interpretation of such charts.

CEFR ²	Versant English Test ³	Versant English Level Test	IELTS ⁴	TOEIC ⁵	TSE ⁶	TOEFL iBT Speaking ⁷	TOEFL iBT ⁸	TOEFL PBT ⁹	TOEFL CBT ¹⁰
A1 - C2	20 - 80	1 - 6	0 - 9	10 - 990	0 - 60	0 - 30	0 - 120	310 - 677	0- 300
<A1	20-25	Level 1	0						
A1	26-35	Level 2	1-2			8-13			
A2	36-46	Level 3	3			13-19			
B1	47-57	Level 4	3.5-4.5	550+	45+	19-23	57-86	457+	137+
B2	58-68	Level 5	5-6			23-28	87-109		
C1	69-78	Level 6	6.5-7	880+	55+	28+	110-120	560+	220+
C2	79-80	Level 6	7.5+						

² Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001). Council of Europe: Cambridge University Press.
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

³ Bernstein, J. De Jong, J. Pisoni, D. & Townshend, B. (2000). Two Experiments on Automatic Scoring of Spoken Language Proficiency. In P. Delcloque (Ed.) Proceedings of InSTIL2000: Integrating Speech Technology in Learning (pp. 57-61). University of Abertay Dundee, Scotland.

⁴ Relating IELTS scores to the Council of Europe's Common European Framework.: http://www.britishcouncil.org/ielts-coe_flier.pdf

⁵ Tannenbaum, Richard and Caroline E. Wylie (2005). Research Reports: Mapping English Language Proficiency Test Scores onto the Common European Framework. Educational Testing Services. <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-05-18.pdf>

⁶ Mapping TOEFL, TSE, TWE, and TOEIC on the Common European Framework (2004). <http://www.besig.org/events/iateflpce2005/ets/CEFsummaryMarch04.pdf>

⁷ Mapping TOEFL iBT on the Common European Framework of Reference (2007).
http://www.nocheating.org/Media/Research/pdf/CEF_Mapping_Study_Interim_Report.pdf

⁸ Mapping TOEFL iBT on the Common European Framework of Reference (2007).
http://www.nocheating.org/Media/Research/pdf/CEF_Mapping_Study_Interim_Report.pdf

⁹ TOEFL iBT Scores: Better information about the ability to communicate in an academic setting (2005).
<http://www.oia.usc.edu.tw/download/files/TOEFL%20iBT%20Scores.pdf>

¹⁰ TOEFL iBT Scores: Better information about the ability to communicate in an academic setting (2005).
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