

ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
COMPETENCE

Department of English / University of Vienna

**CFT**

Test Specifications

ILSS Student Information

Online Administration

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document gives a general overview of the aims and content of the new Common Final Test (CFT) introduced in the winter term 2012/13 as part of the BA curriculum and the 'Lehramtsstudium Unterrichtsfach Englisch' at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna.

## 2. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The main purpose of the CFT is to assess whether students have sufficient reading and writing ability in English to communicate effectively in academic contexts. This includes:

- text comprehension (text types include descriptive, expository, narrative and argumentative text)
- production of well-organised and stylistically appropriate argumentative texts
- application of academically relevant skills (e.g. processing text content, quoting, paraphrasing, summarising)
- language proficiency at B2+/C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

It is hoped that the CFT will have a positive washback effect on the teaching and learning processes in departmental language courses in terms of content, assessment, and links between courses.

## 3. TEST TAKER

The CFT will be taken by all students at the end of the second semester of *Integrated Language and Study Skills* (ILSS) at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna.

## 4. TEST LEVEL

Student performances on the CFT are expected to be in the range of B2+ and C1 according to the CEFR.

## 5. CONSTRUCT

The CFT writing task tests the candidates' ability to present a reasoned and well-structured argument, to provide relevant support and examples, and to use varied, appropriate and accurate language.

Candidates are being assessed on their ability to:

- present and justify an opinion.
- support an argument
  - based on their own knowledge and experience.
  - by selecting relevant data from various sources (including information presented in visual form).
  - by comparing, contrasting, evaluating and challenging ideas, evidence and implications.
- summarise, paraphrase and cite various sources.
- develop ideas logically and use organisational patterns effectively (e.g. paragraphing, information structure, signposting) to produce a cohesive and coherent text.
- use a range of lexico-grammatical resources appropriately and accurately.

The CFT reading tasks test the candidates' ability to:

- skim and scan a text to locate specific information
- understand main idea(s) and supporting details
- understand linking sentences and ideas
- infer meaning from context
- deduce meaning of unfamiliar lexical items
- distinguish between fact and opinion
- adapt reading speed to task

## 6. CONTENT & STRUCTURE

The CFT consists of two parts: a reading and a writing section.

The reading part consists of three reading texts of fairly equal length (approximately 900 words each) but of varying difficulty. Texts are used in their original/authentic form and shortened where necessary. 60 minutes are assigned to answering 40 to 43 items. Task types include multiple choice, short answer questions, sentence completion, gapped summaries, table/flow chart or diagram completion, choosing paragraph headings, choosing text titles, identifying writer's views, matching, or identifying the best summary. Texts include articles from newspapers, textbooks, magazines and journals and are semi-academic in nature, written for a non-specialised audience. Topics should be of interest and relevance to students.

For the writing section, students are required to produce an argumentative essay of 300 to 400 words in 75 minutes. They present a reasoned argument, supporting it by referring to the visual information (two graphs/tables/charts/etc.) and any of the verbal input texts (4 to 6 quotations with a maximum of 250 words in total) provided in the prompt.

## **7. ADMINISTRATION**

### **7.1 Operational phase**

The reading section will be administered first as an online quiz (60 minutes + 5 extra minutes for technical difficulties). Afterwards, the writing task will be provided (75 minutes + 10 extra minutes for downloading/uploading files). Dictionaries are not allowed at any time during the test.

### **7.2 Rating phase**

Students' papers are distributed randomly among ILSS teachers. No teacher marks their own students' papers or of students they may know from previous semesters. Raters independently mark the reading answer sheets (using the scoring key) and the scripts (using the analytic writing assessment scales). Performances below the cut-score will be second marked and ratings will be averaged. In case of a considerable discrepancy between the two ratings, the performances will be rated a third time.

## **8. ASSESSMENT**

### **8.1 Common Final Test (CFT)**

Reading:        objective; one point for each item  
                     The reading part accounts for 40% of the overall CFT score.

Writing:        analytic marking based on the following criteria: task fulfilment, organisation, linguistic accuracy, linguistic range, punctuation, spelling and length  
                     The writing part accounts for 60% of the overall CFT score.

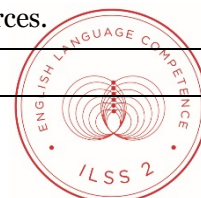
The reading and writing sections will be graded separately. 60% of the overall CFT score is required for a pass grade.

A score below 48% on the writing part will result in a fail grade.

## 8.2 Analytic Assessment Scales

### 8.2.1 Task Fulfilment (5 points)

5 points	<p>All salient points contained in the prompt are cogently elaborated.</p> <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gives a well-founded personal opinion and presents a logically developed argument.</li> <li>selects relevant data from various sources, integrating them into the overall argument to support his/her own points.</li> <li>has fully grasped the contents of the sources and compares/contrasts/evaluates/challenges information/viewpoints.</li> </ul> <p>All formal text type requirements met (citation, paraphrase, etc.).</p>
4 points	<p>All salient points contained in the prompt are elaborated.</p> <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gives a well-founded personal opinion and presents a logically developed argument.</li> <li>selects relevant data from various sources, integrating them into the overall argument to support his/her own points.</li> <li>may have misunderstood some minor points in the sources.</li> </ul> <p>Formal text type requirements largely met (citation, paraphrase, etc.).</p>
3 points	<p>All salient points in the prompt are addressed.</p> <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is, to a fair degree, able to present an argument and give a personal opinion. However, the arguments and opinion are sometimes not sufficiently supported by evidence or examples.</li> <li>relies heavily on sources rather than using them selectively or does not always integrate them effectively into his/her own argument.</li> <li>has misunderstood/misrepresented some points in the sources but the reader would still get the correct general idea.</li> </ul> <p>Formal text type requirements partly met (citation, paraphrase, etc.).</p>
2 points	<p>Not all salient points in the prompt are addressed (e.g. reference to only one graph, central aspect of the prompt ignored).</p> <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presents arguments; however, supporting evidence and examples are either missing or of questionable relevance. OR ... does not clearly state his/her opinion. AND/OR ... merely lists points from the sources or tries to integrate all sources without critical reflection.</li> <li>has misunderstood/misrepresented some points in the sources so that the reader would get a wrong impression.</li> </ul> <p>Formal text type requirements not met.</p>
1 point	<p>The student has misunderstood the task.</p> <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presents a limited number and range of arguments, which are not supported by evidence or examples. OR ... there are major inconsistencies in logical argumentation.</li> <li>does not refer to the sources provided in the prompt or has misunderstood/misrepresented key points from the sources.</li> </ul>
0 points	<p>The student has completely misunderstood the task.</p>



### 8.2.2 Organisation (5 points)

5 points	<p>The text is organised into paragraphs with clear topic sentences and the text can be seen to be structured into introduction, main body and conclusion. There is a clear thesis statement.</p> <p>A variety of linking devices is used between paragraphs. Logical relations between sentences and overall method of development (e.g. result, cause &amp; effect, comparison, etc.) are indicated by the appropriate use of lexis, pronouns, conjunctions and discourse markers.</p>
4 points	<p>The text is organised into paragraphs and structured into introduction, main body and conclusion. The topic of a paragraph is obvious to the reader by the use of a clear topic sentence and subsequent development of the main idea.</p> <p>An appropriate range of linking and cohesive devices is used. There are occasional problems with pronoun reference.</p>
3 points	<p>The text is organised into paragraphs and structured into introduction, main body and conclusion. There is some internal organisation within these paragraphs.</p> <p>There is a thesis statement, but it is not entirely successful/clear.</p> <p>There is some use of cohesive devices. There are problems with pronoun reference.</p>
2 points	<p>The text is organised into paragraphs on the surface level (layout).</p> <p>Unsuccessful introduction (e.g. no thesis statement, main focus not addressed, random selection of details from sources, etc.) and/or conclusion (e.g. introduction of new ideas, no relation to body paragraphs, etc.).</p> <p>Illogical use of linking devices and pronouns.</p>
1 point	<p>The text is not organised into paragraphs and there is no introduction and/or conclusion. The textual development is difficult to follow. There is little or no use of cohesive devices beyond “and/but”.</p>
0 points	<p>There is no apparent structure.</p>

### 8.2.3 Linguistic Accuracy (5 points)

5 points	<p>The text is virtually free of errors.</p>
4 points	<p>The text consistently maintains a high degree of accuracy, with only occasional slips.</p>
3 points	<p>The text shows a relatively high degree of linguistic control. There are some mistakes, which do not cause misunderstanding.</p>
2 points	<p>Several linguistic choices are not satisfactory for the task. Some of these may impede understanding or strain readers, forcing them to pause.</p>
1 point	<p>There are frequent/repeated inaccuracies in the text which may impede understanding of certain passages.</p>
0 points	<p>There are basic and consistent patterns of error in the text. The student has a very poor grasp of the language required for the task.</p>

#### 8.2.4 Linguistic Range (5 points)

5 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student demonstrates a very broad range of language to formulate thoughts precisely, give emphasis and eliminate ambiguity.</li> <li>The student can paraphrase effectively and convey finer shades of meaning (e.g. by using a wide range of qualifying devices), and shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning.</li> <li>The text is consistently appropriate in style and register.</li> </ul>
4 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student has a good command of a broad range of language as required for the task. There are no signs of the student having to restrict what he/she wants to say.</li> <li>The student can paraphrase effectively and qualify arguments in relation to degrees of certainty/uncertainty, belief/doubt, likelihood, etc.</li> <li>The text is appropriate in style and register, with only isolated minor slips.</li> </ul>
3 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student uses a sufficient range of language required for the task.</li> <li>Little use of paraphrasing leads to some repetition.</li> <li>The text is generally appropriate in style and register, with a few deviations.</li> </ul>
2 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student uses a limited range of language, resulting in some imprecision.</li> <li>Absence of paraphrasing leads to frequent repetition.</li> <li>Parts of the text are inappropriate in style and register.</li> </ul>
1 point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student has a very narrow range of language at his/her disposal, which makes it difficult for him/her to formulate clear arguments.</li> <li>The text relies heavily on repetition.</li> <li>The text is inappropriate in style and register.</li> </ul>
0 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The text shows clear signs of restrictions, and the student cannot use language effectively in an academic context.</li> </ul>

#### 8.2.5 Punctuation (2 points)

2 points	The student uses a range of punctuation marks accurately and effectively to convey finer shades of meaning.
1 point	The student has a solid grasp of the most common conventions in punctuation with minor inaccuracies.
0 points	The student has a poor grasp of the conventions in punctuation.

### 8.2.6. Spelling (2 points)

2 points	The spelling is completely accurate (possible 2 slips).
1 point	The text shows some inaccuracies in spelling (possible 3 – 6 slips).
0 points	There are many spelling inaccuracies in the text (more than 6 errors).

### 8.2.7. Length (1 point)

1 point	Length appropriate (300 – 400 words)
0 points	0 – 299 or > 400 words

### 8.2.8. Writing Score: Percentages and Grades

25	100%	Sehr gut (1)
24	96%	
23	92%	
22	88%	Gut (2)
21	84%	
20	80%	
19	76%	Befriedigend (3)
18	72%	
17	68%	Genügend (4)
16	64%	
15	60%	
14	56%	Nicht genügend (5)
13	52%	
12	48%	
11	44%	
10	40%	
9	36%	
8	32%	
7	28%	
6	24%	
5	20%	
4	16%	
3	12%	
2	8%	
1	4%	
0	0%	



## 9. SAMPLE TASK (WRITING)

Present a written argument to an educated reader on the following topic:

*“One of the liveliest current debates [...] revolves around the accelerating global spread of English and the urgent socio-economic, ideological, and ecological issues raised as a consequence of this spread” (Seidlhofer 2003: 7).*

*Do the potential benefits of having English as a global language for international communication outweigh possible disadvantages?*

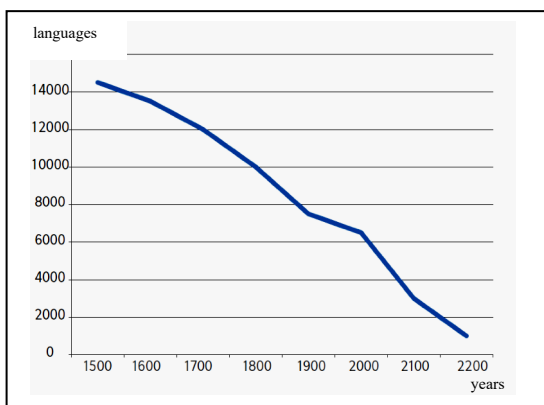
You have **75 minutes** to complete this task.

Write between **300 and 400 words**.

Support your arguments by referring to **both** sources of visual information and **at least one** of the other quotations below.

You will receive points for task fulfilment, good organisation, range of vocabulary and sentence structure, and linguistic accuracy.

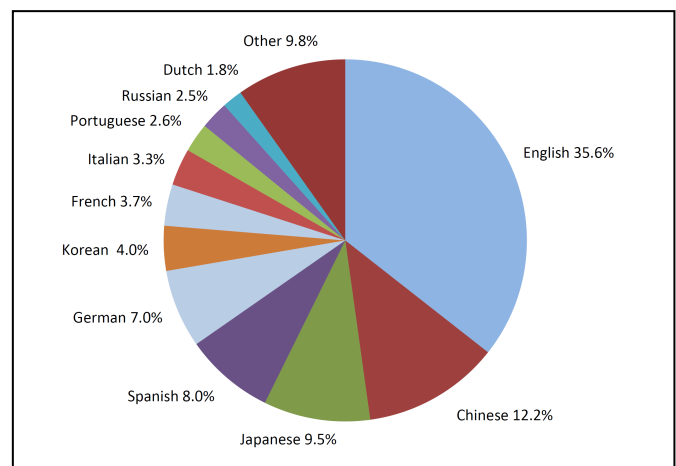
Number of languages worldwide



Graddol (2006: 60)

First languages of Internet users

Total: 680 million



Thurlow et al. (2004: 121)

[...] around two-thirds of the world's top 100 universities are in English-speaking countries.

This is one reason why English is used increasingly as the medium of education in universities across the world.

[...] English-speaking countries have the most entrepreneurial universities, who seek income by marketing their courses to overseas students; and English itself is seen as a key educational investment.

Graddol (2006: 74-76)

[Crystal] warns us of the resentment, envy, anger of the non-English mother-tongue speakers who feel disadvantaged. Or who, worse still, feel their mother tongue or identity threatened.

Hanson (1997: 22)

Language may be a cornerstone of culture, but the culture itself would not have to disappear if English were used as a second or third language for the pure purpose of communicating globally.

Wheaton (2011: 1)

A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people - especially their political and military power.

Crystal (2003: 9)