

Grade Descriptions for Cambridge IGCSE First Language English 0500

What are grade descriptions?

Grade descriptions describe the level of performance typically demonstrated by candidates achieving the different grades awarded for a qualification. For Cambridge IGCSEs, they describe performance at three levels – grades ‘F’, ‘C’ and ‘A’.

Grade descriptions sit alongside other key documents that illustrate examination standards, including:

- the syllabus, which presents what students should be taught over a course of study and explains how this is assessed
- the specimen assessment materials, which illustrate the structure of the assessment and the kinds of tasks that candidates complete
- grade thresholds, which show the total mark required to achieve a grade.

Grade descriptions are produced with a wide range of audiences in mind. For teachers, they support lesson planning and curriculum development, while students may gain useful insights into what is required to achieve a high grade and what candidate performance at lower grades typically looks like. For university admissions staff and employers, and those less familiar with Cambridge, they paint a picture of typical performance at different grades.

Cambridge publishes grade descriptions for a qualification once examinations have taken place for the first time, and we review them when a qualification is substantially revised. They are developed by highly experienced examiners who understand performance standards in the subject area and have studied samples of candidate work.

How do I use this resource?

Grade descriptions are presented as a grid with content areas at the start of each row and the different grades at the top of each column.

The content areas group together various aspects of the syllabus – they reflect topics, assessment objectives, key concepts, syllabus aims and components. The way they are organised is specific to each subject.

For each content area, there is a descriptor for each grade. Reading across the row from left to right, the descriptors represent increasing levels of performance, with each grade descriptor building on, and including, the last.

Each column represents overall performance at a particular grade. Reading down the column from top to bottom, the descriptors capture the range of knowledge, understanding and skills that a candidate ‘comfortably inside the grade’ is likely to demonstrate.

Cambridge produces grade descriptions to support teaching and learning and the interpretation of candidate scores and grades. We do not use them to set grade thresholds. As such, they cannot be used to challenge the grade awarded to any individual candidate.

Grade descriptions

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade F	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Understand meanings, selecting and using information	Students understand a few of the straightforward ideas in the texts that they read independently.	Students understand some of the less obvious ideas in the texts that they read independently.	Students understand some of the sophisticated and subtle ideas in the texts that they read independently.
	They identify some basic factual information that they need to use to answer simple questions.	They identify some relevant information and key ideas that they need to use to answer straightforward questions.	They focus on the precise information and key ideas that they need to use to answer different types of question.
	They mostly understand the meaning of commonly used words in a familiar context.	They work out the general meaning of commonly used words in a familiar context.	They sometimes work out the precise meaning of words used in unusual contexts.
	They sometimes follow the general outline of a text – for example the basic story of a narrative text or the gist of an argument.	They recognise some of the key ideas in a text – for example important events and characters in a narrative text or some of the main points in an argument.	They understand some of the more subtle details or ideas in a text – for example hints at plot developments and motives of characters in a narrative text or the implications of points suggested in an argument.
Understand how writers achieve effects and influence readers	Students understand that writers may want to influence their readers.	Students understand that writers use different words to influence their readers and are sometimes able to explain why a writer may have chosen one word instead of another.	Students understand that writers use and combine particular words in different ways to influence their readers and are sometimes able to explain how they do this.
	They sometimes recognise obvious literary and rhetorical devices that have been used in a text – for example repetition of a letter or word.	They identify examples of straightforward devices – for example similes used to make straightforward comparisons.	They use carefully chosen examples of devices from different parts of a text to illustrate their interpretation – for example identifying patterns in images used to evoke a particular feeling or reaction.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade F	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
	<p>They occasionally suggest in general terms why these devices might be used by a writer.</p> <p>They generally recognise whether a writer wants to create a positive or a negative impression of the subject matter in the minds of their reader.</p>	<p>They sometimes offer relevant suggestions of why these devices have been used in a particular text.</p> <p>They recognise where a writer wants to compare and contrast aspects of the subject matter in the minds of their reader.</p>	<p>They sometimes offer precise explanation of how a writer is using language to influence their reader.</p> <p>They recognise some of the more complex and subtle suggestions the writer is trying to convey to their reader in relation to the subject matter.</p>
<p>Analyse, evaluate and develop facts, ideas and opinions and attitudes</p>	<p>Students recognise straightforward arguments in a text.</p> <p>They repeat a few of the main ideas from the text and sometimes offer general comment on the topic.</p> <p>They sometimes distinguish between fact and unsupported opinion.</p>	<p>Students make straightforward judgements about ideas and opinions in different texts.</p> <p>They use some key ideas from the text to support an opinion and sometimes comment on contrasting attitudes.</p> <p>They sometimes recognise opinion presented as fact.</p>	<p>Students evaluate ideas, opinions and attitudes in different texts to arrive at a considered judgement.</p> <p>They extend ideas and opinions suggested in a text to develop an argument and sometimes probe apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in attitudes.</p> <p>They sometimes distinguish between the ideas and opinions offered in a text and the writer's own attitude.</p>
<p>Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined</p>	<p>Students can describe personal experience and communicate straightforward ideas in short written responses.</p> <p>They outline simple ideas, thoughts and feelings that can generally be understood by the reader.</p>	<p>Students can convey some details of imagined experience and communicate a perspective other than their own in an extended written response.</p> <p>They provide clear, straightforward explanation of ideas, thoughts and feelings.</p>	<p>Students can evoke a sense of atmosphere and attitude and write convincingly from contrasting perspectives.</p> <p>They express complex or subtle ideas, feelings and thoughts precisely and sometimes effectively.</p>

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade F	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
	They sometimes include details in their writing to help their reader – for example dates, times or locations in a personal recollection of an event.	They sometimes include relevant details in their writing to interest their readers – for example a description of the setting in a narrative.	They interest and engage their readers by integrating relevant details into their writing – for example creating a convincing voice for a character.
Organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect	<p>Students can offer a simple record of ideas and opinions.</p> <p>They list ideas and/or opinions, sometimes making relevant connections between them.</p> <p>They sometimes present a short sequence of ideas with some clarity – for example the opening to a simple narrative.</p>	<p>Students organise ideas and opinions in straightforward ways that are generally helpful to their reader.</p> <p>They group some similar ideas and/or opinions and sometimes make clear connections within and between these groups.</p> <p>They generally present ideas and/or opinions chronologically – for example following the order that the ideas appear in a reading text.</p>	<p>Students carefully manage the organisation of ideas and opinions for the benefit of their reader.</p> <p>They structure ideas and/or opinions to make some subtle connections and contrasts clear.</p> <p>They sometimes choose different structures to present ideas and/or opinions for deliberate effect – for example choosing to begin a narrative at a critical point rather than at the beginning of the events in the story.</p>
Use vocabulary, sentence structures and register appropriately	<p>Students can use simple sentences and commonly used vocabulary to communicate with the general reader.</p> <p>They occasionally use a formal register.</p> <p>They occasionally use less common vocabulary appropriately.</p>	<p>Students can vary their sentence structures and vocabulary to communicate with different readers.</p> <p>They are generally able to maintain a formal register where appropriate.</p> <p>They mostly use straightforward vocabulary appropriately. They occasionally use more challenging or precise vocabulary appropriately.</p>	<p>Students use different sentence structures and apt vocabulary to communicate with different readers for different purposes.</p> <p>They usually control their use of formal/informal register as appropriate.</p> <p>They use a range of vocabulary appropriately and precisely.</p>

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade F	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
<p>Use spelling, punctuation and grammar accurately</p>	<p>Students can occasionally control the accuracy of their writing.</p> <p>They sometimes correct errors in spelling and grammar that seriously affect meaning.</p> <p>They sometimes use punctuation correctly to support meaning – for example using a capital letter at the start of a sentence.</p>	<p>Students can control some aspects of the accuracy of their writing.</p> <p>They mostly avoid errors in spelling and grammar that seriously affect meaning.</p> <p>They generally use basic punctuation correctly to communicate meaning – for example separating sentences appropriately.</p>	<p>Students usually control the accuracy of their writing.</p> <p>They rarely make any errors in spelling and grammar that seriously affect meaning.</p> <p>They use punctuation precisely to enhance meaning – for example using speech marks appropriately.</p>

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade 5	Typical performance at grade 3	Typical performance at grade 1
Speaking and listening	<p>Students communicate some simple and general ideas, thoughts and information when speaking English.</p> <p>They usually offer short responses to direct questions. They occasionally try to use a different volume, pace or tone when speaking.</p> <p>They avoid some errors that seriously affect meaning for the listener – for example by accurate pronunciation of key words.</p>	<p>Students communicate straightforward ideas, thoughts and information when speaking English.</p> <p>They make some useful contributions to a conversation. They sometimes vary their pace or emphasis appropriately when speaking.</p> <p>They usually avoid any errors that seriously affect meaning for their listener – for example by correct use of tense when describing events in the future or past.</p>	<p>Students communicate effectively when explaining and discussing ideas, thoughts and information in English.</p> <p>They respond in appropriate detail to help conversations develop. They generally use features such as tone and irony appropriately when speaking.</p> <p>They are careful to avoid or correct errors that might affect meaning for their listener – for example reiterating or clarifying if appropriate in response to their listener’s reaction. They often sound fluent and natural when speaking English.</p>

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