Grade Descriptions for Cambridge International A Level English Language 9093

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 International A Levels, they describe performance at three levels – grades 'E', '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 exemplify 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 achieving the grade is likely to demonstrate.

Where content areas for the first and second halves of the A Level are distinct, they are also assessed at different standards. Performance for content areas assessed at AS Level is therefore described separately in this document.

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 E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Reading and understanding			
Understanding linguistic features and their conventions of use	Students recognise and label a selection of linguistic features. They comment on how the features are conventionally used.	Students correctly recognise and label a wide selection of linguistic features with some developed comment on their conventional use.	Students demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of how and why a range of linguistic features are used by convention. Commentary is fully developed and technical terminology is used accurately.
Reading a wide variety of texts from different time periods	Students identify the period in which prose text was written from a timeline of approximately 1500 to the present day.	Students label and explain the established period in which prose text was written (e.g. Early Modern English).	Students describe in a sophisticated manner how prose text has changed over time and how it may continue to do so, with detailed examples from the stimulus material.
Understanding conventions, linguistic elements and literary features	Students refer to relevant linguistic or literary conventions as seen in archaic, modern or contemporary prose text, tabled and graphic representation of data, or transcribed conversation.	Students convey knowledge and understanding through reasonably sustained commentary when reflecting on linguistic or literary conventions.	Students convey thorough knowledge and understanding through sustained, detailed commentary when reflecting on linguistic or literary conventions.
Additional content areas assessed at AS Level standard			
Understanding conventions, linguistic elements and literary features	*Students read and recognise a wide variety of linguistic and literary features. They describe some of these features and use them to create effects in their own writing.*	*Students explain clearly the effects created by a number of conventions, linguistic elements and literary features. They incorporate a variety of conventions, linguistic elements and literary features in their own writing in order to create some effects in their own writing with confidence.*	*Students explain with insight and in detail the effects created by a wide variety of conventions, linguistic elements and literary features. They demonstrate innovative use of conventions, linguistic elements and literary features in order to create writing which is engaging throughout.*

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Understanding the significance of audience, genre, purpose and context	*Students read and recognise a wide variety of text genres. They describe the genre and context of text and identify its purpose in relation to the intended audience. They describe how language and style are used to create meaning as appropriate to the audience and overall purpose of stimulus material.*	*Students explain clearly the genre, purpose and context of stimulus material. They offer ideas on how language and style are used in stimulus material to create meaning and relate to audience.*	*Students provide detailed and insightful descriptions of genre, purpose and context, presented in a sophisticated manner. They provide insightful ideas in developed explanations of how language and style create meaning and relate to audience.*
	Writing		
Demonstrating clarity of expression and accurately using language	Students write with clarity in an appropriate register with some accuracy. There may be some lapse in register or technical errors which do not impede meaning or flow. They apply linguistic terminology in a limited manner.	Students write fluently with occasional technical errors which do not impede meaning or flow. Register is maintained as appropriate to the task. They apply a range of linguistic terminology which is mostly accurate and precise.	Students write in a sophisticated manner with a high level of accuracy and elevated register. They apply a wide range of linguistic terminology with a high level of fluency, accuracy and precision.
Writing effectively and appropriately for different purposes (analytically or discursively)	Students write effectively in a mainly narrative manner with some analytical or discursive inclusion appropriate to the demands of the task.	Students write analytically or discursively according to the demands of the task. The response may lapse infrequently into a more narrative style.	Students maintain their analytical or discursive writing style throughout their response. Their writing demonstrates insight in relation to the purpose of the task.
Organising, structuring and developing ideas	Students organise ideas by selecting one or two linguistic frameworks through which to present ideas.	Students present a logical sequence of developed ideas, which may be organised through a clear range of linguistic frameworks.	Students develop ideas fully in an insightful manner, making a thorough selection of relevant linguistic frameworks for structure and organisation.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
	They present ideas in a logical sequence of paragraphs which may be developed in a limited manner. They may organise their response in a way which reflects a chronological reading of the stimulus material, rather than synthesise ideas.	Their develop their ideas through a fluent, logical sequence of paragraphs using appropriate discourse markers. Responses are organised with some synthesis of ideas.	They present ideas that flow in a sophisticated manner through sustained, synthesised and detailed work.
Additional content areas assessed at AS Level standard			
Writing in response to stimulus material	*Students create writing in response to stimulus material which may echo or contrast in terms of genre, form, structure, language and style. The response engages the audience but may be limited in the ways in which the stimulus material is reflected. They may directly reproduce some features from the stimulus material in their own writing.*	*Students incorporate ideas from stimulus material to create writing which reflects but does not reproduce the stimulus material.*	*Students make a careful selection of ideas or features from stimulus material to create a sophisticated and original creative response.*
Conceptualisation			
Providing reference to wider study of linguistic issues, concepts, methods and approaches	Students outline analytical or discursive commentary as appropriate to the task, discussing some ideas from their wider study of *Language change*, *Child language acquisition*, *English in the world* and *Language and the self*. They outline commentary of a limited number of established theories and theorists in a generalised fashion.	Students develop analytical or discursive commentary as appropriate to the task with reference to each of the four language topics, citing scholarship from established authors as relevant. Their commentary makes reference to the ways in which theories pertaining to linguistic concepts, methods and approaches are relevant to stimulus material. They reference established theories and/or theorists by providing explanation.	Students develop concise analytical or discursive commentary with reference to historic and current issues concerning each of the four language topics. They cite scholarship of a fully relevant, wide range of established and contemporary theories and theorists. They sustain sophisticated analysis or insightful commentary supported by a wide range of established or contemporary theories and theorists.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Language as data			
Selecting and handling language data from a variety of sources	Students interpret data from *n*-grams, word tables, prose text and transcriptions of conversations held by child and adult interlocutors, selecting an adequate number of relevant examples from the data sources to support several analytical points made.	Students interpret data and describe it from a linguistic standpoint. They select an appropriate number of relevant examples from the data sources to enable a confident and thoughtful analysis.	Students make insightful selections of language data to form a detailed, sustained and technical analysis. They select a wide variety of data, enabling them to demonstrate depth of analysis with evidence of creative thought for reflection on analytical findings.
Analysing and synthesising language data from a variety of sources	Students demonstrate analytical skills, although commentary may lapse into a narrative presentation where the data is described or explained. They provide some synthesis, giving cohesion to the overall analysis.	Students maintain an analytical standpoint throughout most of the response. They synthesise sufficient material for an engaged and sustained response.	Students maintain an analytical standpoint throughout their entire response. They synthesise data into a cohesive, technical analysis and maintain linguistic focus throughout.

Additional content assessed at AS Level standard

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
	Analysing language, meaning and style		
Analysing form, structure and language	Students describe the appropriate structure as relevant to form and make some analysis of a selection of structural features. They recognise and make some analysis of where or how a writer is withholding key information in imaginative writing, juxtaposing counterarguments in discursive writing, or providing evidentiary logic in critical writing. Topic sentences, connectives, internal coherence and discourse markers are recognised. They analyse the form, structure and language of their own writing although commentary may be undeveloped or may be a generalised description of choices made.	Students analyse with some clarity a selection of structural features which are evidenced by the stimulus material. They recognise and make a reasonably confident analysis of where or how a writer is withholding key information in imaginative writing, juxtaposing counterarguments in discursive writing, or providing evidentiary logic in critical writing. Their analysis will cover a range of linguistic or literary features. They analyse the form, structure and language of their own writing with developed commentary.	Students provide detailed and insightful analysis of structural features which have been selected with care from stimulus material. They provide a strong and confident analysis of a writer's technique. Their analysis covers a very wide range of linguistic or literary features. They analyse the form, structure and language of their own writing, providing detailed technical commentary.
Analysing style	Students recognise literary and linguistic features which contribute to the style of stimulus material and how it might contribute to create meaning for its intended audience. These may include imagery in descriptive writing, rhetorical devices in argumentative writing and evaluative lexis in critical writing. They analyse the stylistic choices of their own writing although commentary may be a generalised description of choices made.	Students analyse a reasonably wide selection of stylistic features which are evidenced in the stimulus material. They demonstrate confidence when analysing stylistic features of their own writing.	Students analyse a very wide range of stylistic features. They provide insightful, developed commentary which maintains a linguistic standpoint throughout. They provide a sophisticated analysis of their own writing in terms of stylistic features which have been used to create specific effects.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Selecting features and using language to support analysis of texts	*Students make a limited selection from the stimulus material of literary or linguistic features for analysis. These features are typically those which are most obvious in the text and which the student feels they can analyse most confidently, possibly by identifying patterns of feature incidences. Typically, they use generalised terms to describe their analytical findings. Relevant evidence from the stimulus material is embedded into the response. Quotes may be lengthy rather than succinct.*	*Students select a variety of features for analysis following close reading of text from which a clear level of inference has been gained. Typically, they label their analytical findings with accuracy and confidence using technical terminology. Relevant, succinct quotes are embedded.*	*Students select a wide variety of features for analysis following deep reading from which insightful inference has been gained. They label their evaluative commentary with full accuracy and precision. They embed a carefully made selection of succinct and completely relevant quotes to evidence their claims.*