



CANTEST

Information for Test Candidates



uOttawa

Canadian Test of English for Scholars
and Trainees

**Official Languages and
Bilingualism Institute**



For additional information:

consult our website: www.cantest.uOttawa.ca
or e-mail us at cantest@uOttawa.ca
or write to:

Language Testing Services
Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute
600 King Edward Avenue
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
CANADA

The CanTEST was developed and validated at the University of Ottawa. It originates from work under contract with the Canada/China Language and Cultural Program (administered by St. Mary's University, Halifax, and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency).

What is the purpose of CanTEST?

The CanTEST is a standardized English proficiency test used to determine if you are able to meet the admission requirements of Canadian post-secondary institutions or the fluency requirements of Canadian professional associations. The scores will also give you some idea of how much additional English language training you may need.

What English skills does the CanTEST measure?

The CanTEST measures four skills: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each test section is described briefly below.

LISTENING: The Listening test is made up of about 40 multiple-choice or short-answer questions based on recorded material delivered at normal speed. The listening passages include dialogues, announcements, interviews, and short lectures. The test lasts about 50 minutes, and listening passages vary in length from about one to five minutes.

READING: Reading is measured by two tests. The first is a 10-20 question Skimming and Scanning test, which requires that you read quickly to find specific information in authentic texts such as newspapers, university calendars, web pages, and bibliographies. The second reading test lasts about 50 minutes and measures Reading Comprehension. On this test, you will read passages of 400-700 words, and answer multiple-choice and short-answer questions about them. You will also complete a 20-30 item cloze test, in which words are deleted from a passage. The cloze test is in multiple-choice format.

WRITING The Writing test involves writing a composition on a topic which will be assigned to you. The time for this test is 45 minutes.

SPEAKING: The Speaking test involves a face-to-face interview with two evaluators who will ask you questions on topics of personal, professional, and general interest. The interview lasts about 15 minutes

What sort of topics appear on the CanTEST?

All CanTEST material is taken from real documents such as newspapers, magazines, textbooks, and radio broadcasts. Topic areas of the material include: agriculture, medicine, engineering, history, and education. All the texts are intended for the general reader. You do not have to be a specialist in any of these fields to answer the questions.

How is the CanTEST different from other English proficiency tests?

- Only comprehension is tested. CanTEST is not a test of grammar or structures.
- Questions are always based on a passage and never on a single sentence. Some questions are multiple choice; for others you must supply a short answer or label a diagram.
- CanTEST listening and reading passages are longer than the passages on most tests of English. Some reading passages are a full page in length and listening passages can be as long as five minutes.
- There is a separate reading test of skimming and scanning (rapid reading) for specific information.
- Your ability to write is always tested; an oral interview can be conducted for candidates who need speaking scores.

How can I prepare for the test?

Samples from the Listening, Reading and Writing sections of the test are included in this booklet. Additional practice material, including a sample listening test recording, is available for a fee from the CanTEST office. A course in academic English would also be good preparation.

What do CanTEST Scores look like?

You will receive a separate score for each of the four skills. These scores, called Band Levels, tell you your level from 1 to 5. Descriptions of the level of performance corresponding to each band are on the opposite page.

The scores you receive for the Listening and Reading tests are based on the number of questions you answer correctly. As a general example, you have to get about 60 or 65% of the questions right to achieve a Band Level of 4.0.

In Writing and Speaking, your performance is described by the test evaluators and compared to the Band Level descriptions. For example, a moderately fluent speaker with good pronunciation whose errors are not confusing to the interviewer would receive a band score of 4.0 or 4.5.

What score do I need to pass?

Most Canadian universities require an average of Band 4.5 with no score lower than a Band 4.0. Some departments (e.g., Administration, Law) and some professional organizations (e.g. pharmacy licensing boards) require even higher scores. You should check the requirements at the institution to which you wish your scores to be sent.

What do the band levels mean?

5 + FLUENT USER Consistently effective command of the language in familiar and unfamiliar contexts of language use. Full comprehension. No language problems that would impede academic or professional success. (This band is awarded only in the productive skills)

5 VERY GOOD USER Very good command of the language, even in demanding contexts. High degree of comprehension. Only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies in communication, which very rarely impede communication. Level of proficiency is acceptable for full time academic study.

4 COMPETENT USER Generally effective command of the language in fairly demanding contexts, with a satisfactory level of comprehension. Some inaccuracy and misunderstanding in less familiar contexts with more complex language. Weaknesses exist which sometimes impede communication, and could affect performance in an academic program. Additional language training would be helpful to improve accuracy, speed, and overall proficiency.

3 LIMITED USER Fair command of the language only in familiar language contexts or in interactions with a sympathetic speaker. Limited comprehension. Markedly reduced effectiveness in demanding or unfamiliar situations. Systematic inaccuracies and misunderstandings significantly impede communication and comprehension. Requires additional language training before being considered for academic placement.

2 VERY BASIC USER Some ability to function in highly contextualized, familiar situations, but no real command of the language. Frequent breakdowns in communication.

1 NOVICE Extremely limited command of the language.

Half-bands (e.g. 3.5) are awarded where a candidate's performance exceeds that described in one band but does not fully meet the next higher level.

How will I know what my scores are?

Candidates are mailed an “Unofficial Score Report,” usually within two weeks of the test session. For Toronto and Ottawa sessions, test results are also posted on the website.

How do I have my scores sent to a university or certifying institution?

Official Score Reports are sent by the CanTEST site to the university or certifying institution that you specify on your registration form. If you need scores sent to more than one institution, you must contact the test site; there is a fee for this service.

For how long are my scores valid?

CanTEST scores are valid for two years after the test session date. After two years, test results records are destroyed.

If I don’t obtain the score I need, can I take the test again?

Yes. Candidates are required to wait three months before taking the CanTEST Listening and Reading tests again. If you obtain scores of at least 4.0 in Listening and Reading, but fail Writing or Speaking, you can take Writing by itself after waiting a minimum of six weeks, at a regularly scheduled test session. This policy applies to all CanTEST sites.

Which universities and institutions accept CanTEST scores?

The CanTEST is accepted by universities across Canada and by many Canadian professional licensing bodies. A partial list follows:

Alberta College of Pharmacists
Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapists
Manitoba Pharmaceutical Association

Nova Scotia Pharmaceutical Society
Ontario College of Pharmacists
Canadian Society of Immigration
Consultants

Carleton University
Dalhousie University
Memorial University
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
St. Mary’s University
Technical University of Nova Scotia
University of Manitoba
University of New Brunswick

University of Ottawa
University of Prince Edward Island
University of Regina
University of Saskatchewan
University of Toronto
University of Waterloo
University of Winnipeg

Where can I take the CanTEST?

Our permanent test sites are listed below. Contact the CanTEST coordinator at the site for information about test fees and dates.

ONTARIO (Ottawa and Toronto test sessions)

CanTEST Central Office

Second Language Institute, University of Ottawa
600 King Edward Avenue, Ottawa ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5743 Fax: (613) 562-5126
Email: cantest@uottawa.ca

MANITOBA

Student Affairs, English Language Centre
University of Manitoba
520 University Centre, Winnipeg MA R3T 2N2
Tel.: (204) 474-9251 Fax: (204) 275-8098

English Language Programs,
Continuing Education
University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg MA R3B 2E9
Tel.: (204) 982-1160

NOVA SCOTIA

TESL Centre
St. Mary's University, Halifax NS B3H 3C4
Tel.: (902) 420-5691 Fax: (902) 420-5122
Email: tesl@smu.ca

SASKATCHEWAN

ESL Program, South Residence 114
University of Regina
3737 Wascana Parkway, Regina, SK S4S 0A2
Tel: (306) 585-4585 Fax: (306) 585-4971

Centre for Second Language Instruction
University of Saskatchewan
232 R.J.D.Williams Bldg
221 Cumberland Ave., North, Saskatoon SK S7N 1M3
Tel.: (306) 966-4351 Fax: (306) 966-4356

Sample CanTEST Test Questions

Example: Listening Test Dialogue

Below is an example of the kind of dialogue you might hear on the listening test. For this part of the test, the dialogue and the questions are recorded; they are NOT printed in your test booklet. Only the test answer choices will be printed in your test booklet.

Man: Hey, Margaret, do you know where Don is? I haven't seen him all day and he has some lab reports I need in a big hurry.

Woman: Oh, hi Jack. Didn't you hear? Don is off sick. I was hoping to see him myself, as a matter of fact, to talk about that new project we're both working on.

Man: Well I don't know what to do. He must have those reports at home. I wonder if I should drive over to his house and get them. What do you think?

Woman: Oh, I don't think that's such a good idea. If he's sick, he shouldn't be disturbed. Can't you wait at least one more day?

Man: I suppose you're right. But, if we haven't heard anything by tomorrow, at lunch time, I'm going to give him a call, at least.

Woman: Look, Don's a pretty responsible person. I'm sure he'll find a way to get those reports to you on time. Don't worry.

Man: Okay, okay. Talk to you later.

Now, here are the questions:

1. Why does the man want to see Don?
2. The man wants to know if the woman thinks he should...
3. What does the woman say about Don?
4. What does the man decide in the end?

Listening Test Dialogue Questions

In your test booklet, you will find the following answer choices. You will mark your answers on a separate answer sheet. Sometimes you will also have to write a short answer.

1. a) To find out how sick he is.
b) To obtain some lab reports.
c) To start work on a new project.
2. a) go over to Don's house.
b) telephone Don right away.
c) complete Don's reports.
3. a) He doesn't have the reports.
b) He has sent in the reports.
c) He shouldn't be disturbed.
4. a) To wait until the next day.
b) To call Don before lunch.
c) To visit Don after lunch.

On the test you will also hear a lecture or an interview similar to the one on the next page. These passages are followed by 6 to 10 questions. Most questions are multiple-choice; there are sometimes short answer questions, too. For these longer passages, both the questions and the answer choices will be printed in your test booklet.

Example: Listening Test Lecture

Vitamin C is the word for today and a popular subject of discussion everywhere. Of course we have to start with the word vitamin. Biochemists gradually realized that some diseases weren't caused by germs or micro-organisms but were caused because there was something missing in the diet. They found that if you didn't include certain foods in the diet, you would get diseases like scurvy or beri-beri, and if you included the foods, the disease would disappear. It was as though there were some substances which the body couldn't make for itself, but for which it had to depend on a food supply, and it needed those substances only in traces. This was first actually stated just about the time of nineteen hundred and one or thereabouts. A Polish-born American biochemist, Casimir Funk, suggested that these substances, required in very small quantities, be called vitamins because the first substances located looked as though they had a certain group in the molecule, called the amine group. And "vita" is from the Latin word for "life," so they became lifeamines. Well, then, this was all very well except that as researchers learned more and more about these vitamins, it turned out that in some of them, there was no amine group, so they dropped the "e" and it became "vitamins." A vitamin is a substance, needed by the body for life,—in small quantities—which the body cannot make for itself.

Well, as we discovered the various vitamins, we had to name each one, and first we couldn't name them because we didn't know what they were chemically, so we didn't commit ourselves. We spoke about vitamin A, vitamin B, vitamin C, and so on. It was much later before the term "ascorbic acid" was introduced. Vitamin C itself turned out to be the vitamin that prevented scurvy. If vitamin C were absent from the diet, you got scurvy. If you restored it to the diet, you cured scurvy. Scurvy takes place only when you're on a very monotonous diet that doesn't include fruits, vegetables, things like that. If you eat nothing but dried biscuits and dried beef you'll eventually get scurvy because these foods don't contain vitamin C.

And that means on long voyages, you're risking scurvy. To go back a little in history, scurvy was a serious thing in the late 1700's. Great Britain depended on its navy and its navy was constantly being knocked out of action by scurvy. There was a Doctor Lindt who found out that certain foods would prevent scurvy, and by experimentation he just discovered that limes were a good way of preventing scurvy, and he persuaded the navy to make use of them. It took years and years and years—in fact it was only when the navy was up against Napoleon, where victory was really important, that they decided to try out these limes and all the British sailors were forced to have lime juice every day. The limes cured scurvy. And, as I said, eventually scientists discovered exactly what the chemical was and discovered its structure, and they named it "ascorbic acid." "Ascorbic" is from the Latin word for scurvy, *scorbutus*, and the "a" at the beginning is the Greek negative, so ascorbic acid means "no scurvy."

Listening Test Lecture Questions

1. Around the year 1900, biochemists began to realize that some diseases were caused by
 - a) certain foods in the diet.
 - b) certain substances in food.
 - c) micro-organisms found in food.
 - d) something missing in the diet.
2. Why was the “e” dropped from the original word “vitamines”?
 - a) The word “vitamin” is easier to pronounce.
 - b) Not all vitamins have the amine group.
 - c) People had forgotten the origin of the term.
 - d) Scientists had located more real vitamins.
3. The vitamins were named “A”, “B”, “C”, etc., because
 - a) they were discovered one at a time.
 - b) they were very elementary substances.
 - c) their chemical composition was not known.
 - d) their function was not fully determined.
4. What did Dr. Lindt discover?
 - a) The foundations of modern vitamin theory.
 - b) The chemical structure of vitamin C.
 - c) Foods which would prevent scurvy.
 - d) That long voyages caused scurvy.
5. When did the British navy started to use limes?
 - a) as soon as sailors got sick.
 - b) during the war against Napoleon.
 - c) as soon as their effect was discovered.
 - d) long before the late 1700’s.
6. What is the main topic of this passage?
 - a) The history of vitamin C.
 - b) The treatment of scurvy.
 - c) The different uses of vitamins.
 - d) The origin of modern nutrition.

Example: Skimming and Scanning Questions

Below is an example from the Skimming and Scanning section of the reading test. In this section, the questions are quite easy but you have to find the answer very quickly. Rather than read through the passage, it is better to read the questions first and then try to find the answers in the passage. On the official test you will have 10 minutes to find the answers to two passages.

The questions below refer to the newspaper article which is printed on the opposite page.

1. What is this article about?
 - a) The number of foreign students studying in Canada
 - b) The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
 - c) University student enrolment across Canada.

2. Approximately how many full-time students attended university in the 1989-90 academic year?

- 3-4. Name two provinces which showed a decline in enrolment in 1988-89.

5. True or False: There was an increase in the number of foreign students enrolled in full-time undergraduate programs.

6. What was the percent of increase in enrolment for full-time students in 1989-90?

7. What is one reason stated in the text for last year's declines?

8. How many institutions are members of AUCC?

Skimming and Scanning Text

University student enrolment passes half-million mark

FOR THE FIRST TIME in history, the number of full-time students at Canadian universities has passed the half-million mark, reports the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC).

This survey, just completed, of fall enrolments for the 1989-90 academic year was conducted by the AUCC in cooperation with the Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) and the Council of Ontario Universities (COU).

Preliminary figures show an increase in the total number of full-time students of 3.2% over the same period last year, making 1989-90 the tenth straight record year for full-time enrolments. Ironically, the 1980s were widely expected to be a period of declining enrolments.

As in years past, most of this projected increase is due to substantial growth in full-time undergraduate enrolments. Unlike 1988-89, however, all provinces share in the growth: the two provinces that recorded declines in last year's survey, Saskatchewan (-2.4%) and Alberta (-1.5%), report increases of 1.8% and 3.2% respectively. Enrolment quotas, limited growth policies and higher admission standards at several of these provinces' largest universities led to last year's declines. These measures are still in place but with some changes in enrolment ceilings and procedures for applying quotas.

Similarly, the numbers of first year full-time undergraduates are higher in all provinces than they were at the same time last year. In this category also, Alberta and Saskatchewan report significant increases in this year's survey, compared to a decrease last year.

The AUCC survey also shows a small increase in the number of full-time undergraduate foreign students studying in Canada.

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada has as its membership 88 universities and university-level colleges. It promotes cooperation among institutions of higher education and represents the university community to governments and to national and international bodies concerned with university education and research.

Example: Reading Text

The permanent conversion of farmland to urban and industrial development is a major concern today. Accurate data on the rate of such losses are not available, but estimates for the area of land absorbed for every increase of 1,000 in the urban population vary from about 10 to 400 hectares. The higher figure includes urban fringe land alienated from agriculture by land speculation and resulting high prices. If an average figure of 80 hectares of every increase of 1,000 in the urban population is used, the projected permanent conversion of land to urban development in Quebec and Ontario is 300,000 hectares and 500,000 hectares respectively. More than half of this land is good agricultural land in climatically favourable areas. Around Montreal, for instance, 8,700 hectares of the best agricultural land in Quebec is being lost to development each year. Equally serious may be the loss of farmland to low-density rural housing, but no firm data are available.

There is a similar trend in Western Canada. About 40,000 hectares of farmland were lost to urban development between 1962 and 1972. In Alberta, over 16,000 hectares of prime land were absorbed in the course of seven years by the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, and there is evidence that smaller towns on the Prairies are consuming farmland at up to twice the rate, per unit population, of the big cities. The areas mentioned may not seem impressive in relation to the total area of farmland in Canada, and it is true that few statistics are available on the rates of loss of farmland. However, the picture is clear enough to provide the basis for rational choices.

It must be remembered that only tiny areas of Canada, less than one per cent, have climates and soils suitable for the production of corn and soft fruits. Most of these valuable parcels of land are in the path of rapid urban and industrial growth. Productive farmland close to the city is basic insurance against future events such as food shortages and high prices that would result from: (a) a dramatic increase in the world's population; (b) a climatic shift such as a decrease of even a degree or two in the mean annual temperature; (c) a series of dry years; or (d) increasingly high transportation costs due to energy shortages.

Because of its "greenbelt" character, farmland is also of immeasurable aesthetic value. City dwellers will often drive for miles to experience an orchard in blossom and enjoy the rural scene. Wildlife ecologists have persuaded us of the value of preserving endangered species like the whooping crane and of the necessity of selecting pipeline routes that will not disturb migrating animals like the caribou. Surely it is not too much to expect that we recognize the necessity of preserving for agriculture the prime farmland close to cities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.

Reading Text Questions

1. The main idea of this passage is that in Canada
 - a) urban and industrial growth should be slowed down.
 - b) losses of farmland constitute an important problem.
 - c) accurate statistics on farmland conversion are needed.
 - d) prime farmland is scarce in areas of good climate.
2. Why do estimates of the rate of farmland conversion vary from 10 to 400 hectares?
 - a) There is no uniform definition of “farmland.”
 - b) The urban population is growing at such a rapid rate.
 - c) Urban fringe land is not always included in the figures.
 - d) Experts have not devoted enough attention to the problem.
3. What would productive farmland near cities do?
 - a) Prevent possible food shortages.
 - b) Keep present food prices high.
 - c) Encourage even more urban growth.
 - d) Increase the value of urban fringe land.
4. In smaller towns on the Prairies, farmland is being consumed
 - a) in proportion to increased land speculation.
 - b) at the rate of 16,000 hectares every 7 years.
 - c) principally by low-density rural housing.
 - d) at a faster rate than in-the big cities.
5. The amount of agricultural land lost does not seem “impressive” because
 - a) there is such a large amount of farmland in Canada.
 - b) the problem only affects Eastern Canada.
 - c) only crops such as corn and soft fruits are affected.
 - d) people do not know the real extent of the problem.
6. Maintaining urban fringe land for agricultural use will avoid problems associated with
 - a) a rise in the mean annual temperature.
 - b) soil unsuitable for production.
 - c) rising transportation costs.
 - d) an excessive amount of moisture.
7. The author concludes by asking readers
 - a) to propose solutions to the problem.
 - b) to learn to appreciate the aesthetic value of farmland.
 - c) to refrain from disturbing the animals when they visit farms.
 - d) to support the preservation of farmland near big cities.

Example: Cloze Test Passage

In the text below, words have been replaced with blanks numbered from 1 to 25. First read through the text to get the general meaning. Next, re-read the text, choosing for each blank the word on the next page that best fits both the grammar and the meaning.

The Conversation Class

The majority of students learning English are primarily interested in speaking the language. Unfortunately, in most English courses, far more _____ (1) is paid to the skill of writing _____ (2) to speech. Yet, in the end, a _____ (3) knowledge of English will be judged _____ (4) the world at large not on his _____ (5) to write the language but _____ (6) speak it.

As far as the teacher _____ (7) concerned, part of the difficulty comes _____ (8) the fact that conversation lessons are _____ (9) at all easy to conduct. Each _____ (10) must be carefully prepared, otherwise the _____ (11) will obtain little or no response _____ (12) his class. No teacher would expect _____ (13) students to attempt written composition before _____ (14) had mastered a large number _____ (15) basic sentence patterns and learned _____ (16) write simple, compound and complex sentences. _____ (17), many teachers will try to start _____ (18) discussion with a group of students _____ (19) providing the students with any preparation _____ (20) all. During most classes of this _____ (21), the student has to struggle to _____ (22) complex ideas in English. The teacher may _____ (23) hesitant to correct him because this _____ (24) interrupt the flow of conversation. Even _____ (25) he does correct him, the student will learn very little. Sometimes the whole class breaks down and the teacher ends up doing all the talking.

Cloze Test Answer Choices

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1. a) attention
b) importance
c) interest
d) time | 8. a) after
b) by
c) from
d) with | 15. a) many
b) of
c) on
d) the | 21. a) course
b) discussion
c) kind
d) session |
| 2. a) instead
b) or
c) than
d) then | 9. a) also
b) becoming
c) most
d) not | 16. a) and
b) can
c) how
d) to | 22. a) express
b) have
c) learn
d) many |
| 3. a) bilingual
b) overall
c) student
d) student's | 10. a) course
b) lesson
c) question
d) students | 17. a) Consequently
b) Not
c) Therefore
d) Still | 23. a) be
b) not
c) often
d) to |
| 4. a) around
b) by
c) over
d) to | 11. a) conversation
b) result
c) student
d) teacher | 18. a) a
b) by
c) some
d) the | 24. a) correction
b) have
c) might
d) student |
| 5. a) ability
b) method
c) skill
d) way | 12. a) about
b) for
c) from
d) in | 19. a) and
b) are
c) by
d) without | 25. a) if
b) that
c) then
d) time |
| 6. a) capacity
b) how
c) they
d) to | 13. a) every
b) from
c) his
d) their | 20. a) at
b) before
c) in
d) of | |
| 7. a) be
b) has
c) is
d) was | 14. a) have
b) having
c) he
d) they | | |

Answer Key

Dialogue	Skim Scan Test	Reading	Cloze		
1. b	1. c	1. b	1. a	10. b	19. d
2. a	2. over ½ million	2. c	2. c	11. d	20. a
3. c	3-4. Alberta,	3. a	3. d	12. c	21. c
4. a	Saskatchewan	4. d	4. b	13. c	22. a
Lecture	5. True	5. d	5. a	14. d	23. a
1. d	6. 3.2%	6. c	6. d	15. b	24. c
2. b	7. Enrolment	7. d	7. c	16. d	25. a
3. c	quotas, or limited		8. c	17. d	
4. c	growth policies, or		9. d	18. a	
5. b	higher admission				
6. a	standards				
	(any one) 8. 88				

Example Writing Topics

On the writing test, you will be asked to write about 300 words in 45 minutes, on a topic assigned to you. Below are two sample topics.

In countries throughout the world, students are required to study history in school. Why is history considered an important school subject? Provide two or three reasons and support your ideas with examples.

Technology has been viewed as a two-edged sword. Some people feel it improves the quality of life while others feel it creates new problems that threaten the quality of life. Discuss these two positions using examples. Then state which position you agree with and why.

