

# Interpreting Pearson Test of English Academic Scores

## Introduction

Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) is a computer-based academic English language test. The purpose of PTE Academic is to accurately assess the Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing ability of test takers who are non-native speakers of English and who want to study at institutions where English is the principal language of instruction.

Pearson has followed rigorous psychometric procedures to ensure that the information contained in the PTE Academic score report is an accurate reflection of the students' academic English language proficiency at a given point in time. PTE Academic was field tested with more than 10,000 test takers in test centers in 21 countries, including China, Japan, India, Australia, and the United States. The field test included test takers born in 158 different countries speaking 126 different languages.

PTE academic uses 20 innovative and integrated item types to assess the four key skills. All items in PTE Academic are machine scored. Scores for items assessing Listening and Reading skills are based on correctness alone. Scores for items measuring Speaking and Writing skills are based on correctness, formal aspects, i.e., appropriate content and the quality of responses.

This document outlines how scores are reported for PTE Academic, the different levels of scoring, how test takers are scored and what those scores mean in terms of language ability and alignment to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF or CEFR).

## Reporting scores

With PTE Academic score users will get the information they need to make decisions in a timely manner. All schools, institutions, and other organizations that recognize and accept PTE Academic scores will have access to an enhanced reporting and results service that will support the admissions process and assist institutions in making more informed admissions decisions. PTE Academic scores will be delivered to the test taker online, typically within five business days. Test takers can then designate the institutions or agencies to which they would like their scores forwarded by Pearson. Institutions will then be informed that scores are available to retrieve from the PTE Academic Score Reports Website.

Because PTE Academic is a high-stakes test and to ensure test taker integrity, sophisticated features have been developed within the PTE Academic Score Reports Website to maintain the security of test results.

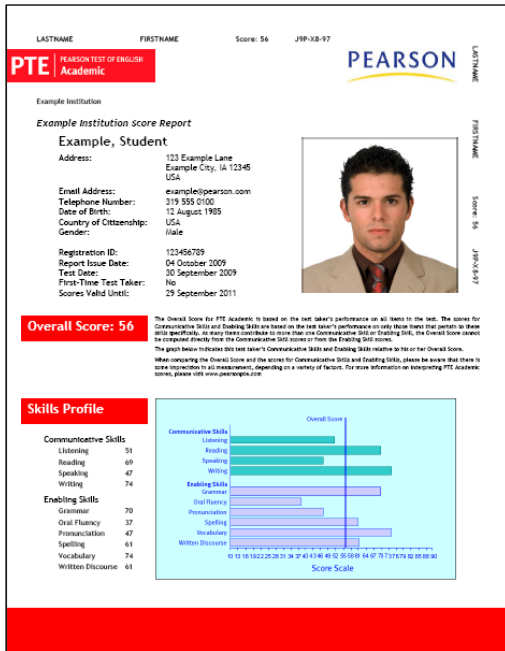


Figure 1: Example Institution PTE Academic score report

## Score scale

Scores are presented in a table on the score report. Scores are also presented graphically to portray the relative strengths and weaknesses of the test taker. The PTE Academic score scale ranges from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 90. The philosophy underlying this range is that individuals do not have a complete 'zero' in any language and no individual knows any language to its fullest extent. All scores are expressed on the same numeric scale and any numeric score has the same meaning on all of the scales.

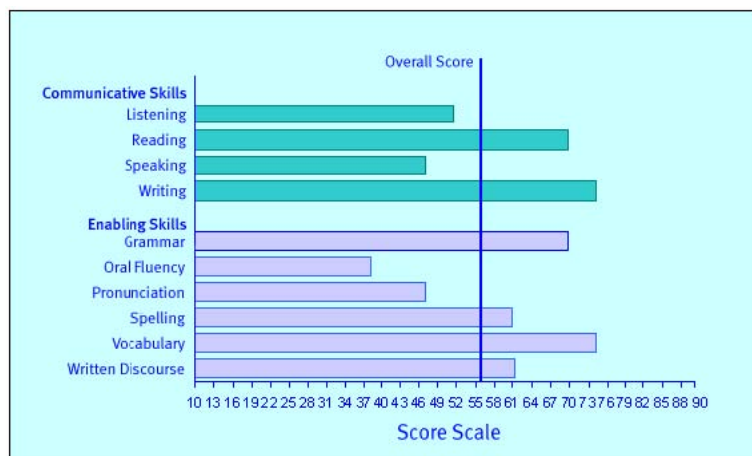


Figure 2: PTE Academic score scale

### There are two types of score report:

- A test taker version, which should not be accepted by a score user
- The official institution version, which will be available to institutions designated by the test taker

### To help verify the identity of the test taker, PTE Academic score reporting services will include the following information accessible via the internet:

- A photograph of the test taker on the score report taken at the time of testing
- Access to an electronic database containing the score report information in a format downloadable to the institution's filing systems
- A Personal Introduction (Voice Print), capable of being used biometrically to compare the test taker's voice with the voice recorded at the time of testing

Score users may wish to consider individual Communicative Skills and Enabling Skills in addition to the Overall Score. For example, institutions may decide that for undergraduate studies, oral skills (Listening and Speaking) are most important whereas for certain postgraduate studies, the written skills may become relatively more important. Therefore, institutions may need to take into account the individual skill demands of different programs when establishing their minimum score requirements.

## Types of scores

PTE Academic score reports contain highly detailed information. They report three types of scores.

1. **The Overall Score** reflects the overall English language ability of a test taker. The score is computed by summing all items in the test. The range for the overall score is 10–90.
2. **Scores for Communicative Skills** include scores for Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing. Each of these scores is based on all items that address a Communicative Skill either as a single skill or integrated with another skill. The range for each Communicative Skill score is 10–90.
3. **Scores for Enabling Skills** include Grammar, Oral Fluency, Pronunciation, Spelling, Vocabulary, and Written Discourse. These scores are computed by summing the Enabling Skills score over all items addressing that skill. The range for each Enabling Skills score is 10–90.
  - **Grammar** is defined as the correct use of language with respect to word form and word order at the sentence level.
  - **Oral Fluency** is defined as the smooth, effortless, and expeditious delivery of speech.
  - **Pronunciation** is defined as the ability to produce speech sounds in the way that most regular speakers of the language do, for example, in such a way that utterances are easily understandable to most regular speakers of the language. Regional or national pronunciation variants are considered correct to the degree that they are understandable to most regular speakers of the language.
  - **Spelling** is defined as the writing of words according to the spelling rules of the language. All national variations in spelling are considered correct.
  - **Written Discourse** is defined as the correct and communicatively efficient production of written language at the textual level. Written Discourse skills are manifested from the structure of a written text, its internal coherence, logical development, and the range of linguistic resources used by the test taker to express meaning precisely.
  - **Vocabulary** is defined as the appropriate choice of words as well as the range of words used by the test taker to express meaning precisely in written and spoken English.

The scores for Enabling Skills are based on the test taker’s performance on only those items that pertain to these Enabling Skills specifically.

## Enabling Skills scores explained

### Example one

Figure 3 below demonstrates how two different Enabling Skills scores for Pronunciation and Oral Fluency are calculated using an integrated Listening and Speaking item type *Re-tell lecture* as an example.

Integrated speaking task (involving both listening and speaking)

- You will hear a short lecture. After listening to the lecture, in 10 seconds, please speak into the microphone and retell what you have just heard from the lecture in your own words. You will have 40 seconds to give your response.

The test taker's response is scored on:

Content (if zero, no further scoring)		
+ Pronunciation	→	Pronunciation score
+ Oral Fluency	→	Oral Fluency score
<u>= Total Item score</u>	→	Speaking score
	→	Listening score
	→	Overall score

Figure 3: Example of how an integrated Listening and Speaking item type *Re-tell lecture* is scored

The item is first scored on **Content**. If the test taker gives no response or an irrelevant response, the content is scored at 0. The response is not then scored for any other traits.

If the test taker provides an acceptable response (i.e., they receive a mark for content), the item will be scored on two traits: **Pronunciation, and Oral Fluency**.

The scores for each trait contribute to the overall score for that Enabling Skill. The content score and trait scores are summed to give the **Total Item score** that contributes to the **Listening score, Speaking score and Overall score**.

Example two

Figure 4 below demonstrates how more types of Enabling Skill scores are calculated. The example is based on an independent Writing item type *Write essay*.

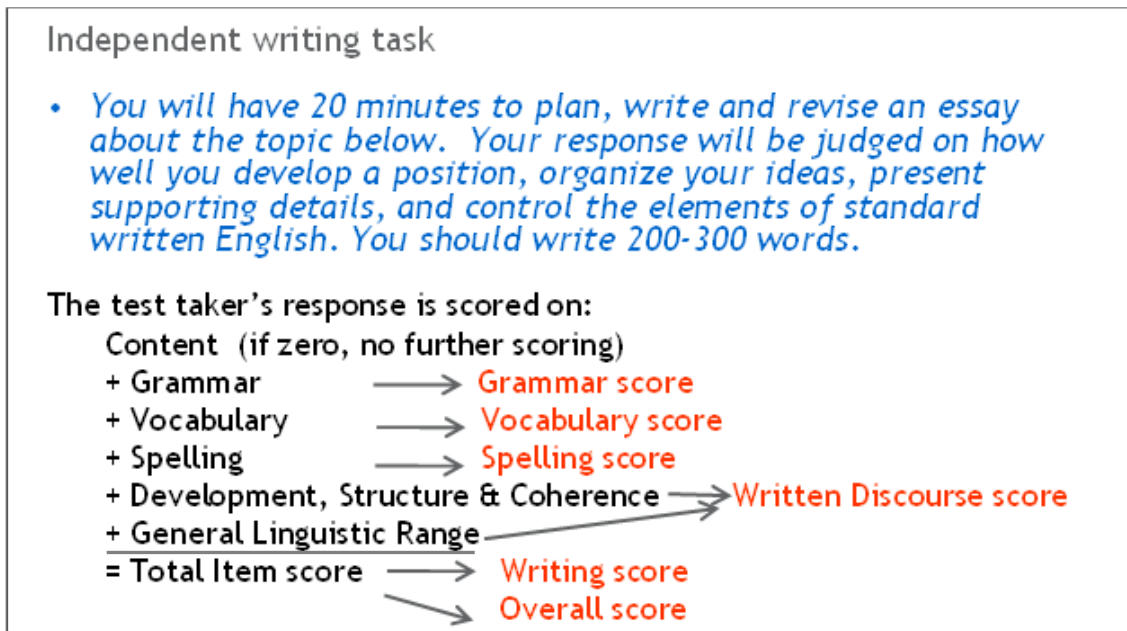


Figure 4: Example of how an integrated Listening and Speaking item type *Write essay* is scored

As with the Integrated Speaking task in Figure 3, the item will first be scored on **Content**. If a test taker gives no response or irrelevant response, the content will be scored as 0. Only if the test taker provides an acceptable answer is the item scored on the traits.

The trait score on Grammar contributes to the Enabling Skill **Grammar score**. The trait score on Vocabulary contributes to the Enabling Skill **Vocabulary score**. The trait score on Spelling contributes to the Enabling Skill **Spelling score**. The trait score on Development, Structure, and Coherence together with the trait score on General Linguistic Range contribute to the Enabling Skill **Written Discourse score**.

The content score and the five trait scores add up to the **Total Item score**. The total item score contributes to the **Writing score** and to the **Overall score**.

## Types of scoring

There are two types of scoring in PTE Academic.

### Correct or incorrect

Some item types are scored as either **correct** or **incorrect**. If the responses to these items are correct, the test taker receives the maximum score points available for each item type. If the answer is incorrect, no score points are given.

### Partial credit

Other item types are scored as **correct**, **partially correct** or **incorrect**. If the responses to these items are correct, the test taker receives the maximum score points available for each item type. If the response is partially correct, the test taker receives some score points, but fewer than the maximum score points available for each item type. If the answer is incorrect, no score points are awarded. This type of scoring is referred to as ‘partial credit’ scoring.

Figure 5 shows the item types that are scored as correct or incorrect, and those where partial credit scoring applies.

Part of the test	Item type	Skills assessed	Type of scoring
Part 1: Speaking and writing	Personal introduction	Not assessed	Not scored
	<i>Read aloud</i>	Reading and Speaking	Partial credit
	<i>Repeat sentence</i>	Listening and Speaking	Partial credit
	<i>Describe image</i>	Speaking	Partial credit
	<i>Re-tell lecture</i>	Listening and Speaking	Partial credit
	<i>Answer short question</i>	Listening and Speaking	Correct/incorrect
	<i>Summarize written text</i>	Reading and Writing	Partial credit
	<i>Write essay</i>	Writing	Partial credit
Part 2: Reading	<i>Multiple-choice, choose single answer</i>	Reading	Correct/incorrect
	<i>Multiple-choice, choose multiple answers</i>	Reading	Partial credit
	<i>Re-order paragraphs</i>	Reading	Partial credit
	<i>Reading: Fill in the blanks</i>	Reading	Partial credit
	<i>Reading and Writing: Fill in the blanks</i>	Reading and Writing	Partial credit
Part 3: Listening	<i>Summarize spoken text</i>	Listening and Writing	Partial credit
	<i>Multiple-choice, choose multiple answers</i>	Listening	Partial credit
	<i>Fill in the blanks</i>	Listening and Writing	Partial credit
	<i>Highlight correct summary</i>	Listening and Reading	Correct/incorrect
	<i>Multiple-choice, choose single answer</i>	Listening	Correct/incorrect
	<i>Select missing word</i>	Listening	Correct/incorrect
	<i>Highlight incorrect words</i>	Listening and Reading	Partial credit
	<i>Write from dictation</i>	Listening and Writing	Partial credit

Figure 5: PTE Academic item types and the scoring applied

## Alignment of PTE Academic scores to the Common European Framework Levels

### The Common European Framework

PTE Academic is aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF or CEFR), a widely recognized benchmark for language ability. The CEF includes a set of language levels defined by descriptors of language competencies. The six-level framework was developed by the Council of Europe (2001) to enable language learners, teachers, universities, or potential employers to compare and relate language qualifications obtained in different educational contexts. It describes language proficiency in Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing on a six-level scale, grouped in three bands: A1–A2 (Basic User), B1–B2 (Independent User), and C1–C2 (Proficient User).

- **A1 and A2** are too low to be considered as entry levels to university.
- Students at **B1** would be admissible for entry if preparatory academic-level English language courses are taken.
- **B2** is typically the level required to be able to follow academic-level instruction and to participate in academic education, including both coursework and student life.
- Students at **C1** would be very comfortable participating in all postgraduate activities including teaching. C1 is NOT required for students entering university at undergraduate level.
- **C2** indicates an extremely high level of English that in reality is reached by very few language learners and is not required for students entering university at any level.

### PTE Academic scores and CEF levels

The alignment of PTE Academic scores to the CEF is based on empirical data gathered during extensive field tests. Figure 6 below shows the estimated alignment of PTE Academic scores to the CEF.

- Scores of **10–29** indicate that test takers are likely to perform language tasks at **A1** level.
- Scores of **30–42** suggest the level **A2**. The levels A1 and A2 are considered to be too low for university-level study.
- Scores of **43–58** indicate that test takers are probably able to carry out language tasks at **B1** level.
- Scores of **59–75** indicate that test takers are likely to be able to perform language tasks at **B2** level.
- Scores of **76–84** indicate that test takers are probably able to carry out language tasks at **C1** level.
- Scores of **85 and above** suggest that test takers are most likely to be able to perform language tasks at **C2** level.

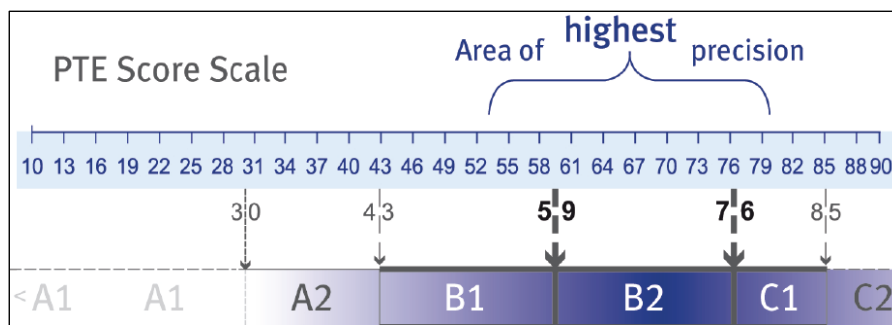


Figure 6: Alignment of CEF Levels to PTE Score Scale

Council of Europe (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment; Cambridge University Press.

## Contact us

For queries about scores or PTE Academic in general please:

- Use the FAQs at [www.pearsonpte.com](http://www.pearsonpte.com)
- Complete our [online form](#)
- Email one of the following addresses:

US and South America

[usreco@pearson.com](mailto:usreco@pearson.com)

Canada

[canreco@pearson.com](mailto:canreco@pearson.com)

United Kingdom and Ireland

[ukireco@pearson.com](mailto:ukireco@pearson.com)

Europe, Middle East, Africa and India

[emaireco@pearson.com](mailto:emaireco@pearson.com)

Asia Pacific, Australia and New Zealand

[apacreco@pearson.com](mailto:apacreco@pearson.com)

Appendix A  
CEF Descriptors for B1, B2, and C1

Level	Descriptor	What does this mean for a score user?
<b>B1 (43–58)</b>  <b>Threshold</b>  <b>Independent User</b>	<p>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.</p> <p>Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p>	<p>The B1 descriptor is insufficient for full academic level participation in language activities. It allows a student to get by in everyday situations independently and would be admissible for entry only if preparatory academic level English language courses are taken.</p>
<b>B2 (59–75)</b>  <b>Vantage</b>  <b>Independent User</b>	<p>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization.</p> <p>Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.</p> <p>Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</p>	<p>B2 was designed as the level required to participate independently in higher level language interaction. It is typically the level required to be able to follow academic level instruction and to participate in academic education, including both coursework and student life.</p>
<b>C1 (76–84)</b>  <b>Effective Operational Proficiency</b>  <b>Proficient User</b>	<p>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning.</p> <p>Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.</p>	<p>C1 is a level that would be very comfortable to participate in all postgraduate activities including teaching. It is not required for students entering university at an undergraduate or postgraduate level. One could expect that most international students who enter university with a B2 level would acquire a level close to or at C1 after living in the country during several years and actively participating in all language activities encountered in university.</p>