

Occupational English Test (OET)

The Occupational English Test (also known as **OET**) is the English language test for healthcare professionals. It assesses the language communication skills of healthcare professionals who wish to register and practice in an English-speaking environment.

OET is available for the following 12 professions: dentistry, dietetics, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry, radiography, speech pathology, and veterinary science.

History

OET was designed in the late 1980s by Professor Tim McNamara, under the guidance of the Australian National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR), which administered the test at that time. The test has been researched and developed continuously since then to ensure that it has kept up with current theory and practice in language assessment. This work has been done by the University of Melbourne's Language Testing Research Centre and by Cambridge Assessment English.

Since March 2013 the test has been owned by **Cambridge Boxhill Language Assessment Trust (CBLA)**, a venture between Cambridge Assessment English and Box Hill Institute.

Recognition

OET is recognized by regulatory healthcare boards and councils in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Ireland, Dubai, Singapore, Namibia and Ukraine. Many organizations, including hospitals, universities and colleges, are using OET as proof of a candidate's ability to communicate effectively in a demanding healthcare environment. In addition, OET is recognized by the Australian Department of Home Affairs and Immigration New Zealand for all visa categories where an English test may be required.

Each recognizing organization determines which grade results mean that candidates meet the language competency standards to function in their profession. A full list of regulatory organizations that accept OET can be seen on the official website.

Format

OET provides a valid and reliable assessment of all four language skills – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking – with an emphasis on communication in medical and health professional settings.

OET comprises four sub-tests:

- Listening (approximately 45 minutes)
- Reading (60 minutes)
- Writing (45 minutes)

- Speaking (approximately 20 minutes).

Listening

Candidates are required to demonstrate that they can follow and understand a range of health-related spoken materials such as patient consultations and lectures.

Part A - consultation extracts (about 5 minutes each)

Part A assesses candidates' ability to identify specific information during a consultation. They are required to listen to two recorded health professional-patient consultations and complete the health professional's notes using the information they hear.

Part B – short workplace extracts (about 1 minute each)

Part B assesses candidates' ability to identify the detail, gist, opinion or purpose of short extracts from the healthcare workplace. They are required to listen to six recorded extracts (e.g. team briefings, handovers, or health professional-patient dialogues) and answer one multiple-choice question for each extract.

Part C – presentation extracts (about 5 minutes each)

Part C assesses candidates' ability to follow a recorded presentation or interview on a range of accessible healthcare topics. They are required to listen to two different extracts and answer six multiple-choice questions for each extract.

Reading

Candidates are required to demonstrate that they can read and understand different types of text on health-related subjects.

Part A – expeditious reading task (15 minutes)

Part A assesses candidates' ability to locate specific information from four short texts in a quick and efficient manner. The four short texts relate to a single healthcare topic, and they must answer 20 questions in the allocated time period. The 20 questions consist of matching, sentence completion and short answer questions.

Part B and Part C – careful reading tasks (45 minutes)

Part B assesses candidates' ability to identify the detail, gist or main point of six short texts sourced from the healthcare workplace (100-150 words each). The texts might consist of extracts from policy documents, hospital guidelines, manuals or internal communications, such as emails or memos. For each text, there is one three-option multiple-choice question.

Part C assesses candidates' ability to identify detailed meaning and opinion in two texts on topics of interest to healthcare professionals (800 words each). For each text, candidates must answer eight four-option multiple choice questions.

Writing

The task is to write a letter, usually a referral letter. Sometimes, especially for some professions, a different type of letter is required: e.g. a letter of transfer or discharge, or a letter to advise or inform a patient, career, or group.

Speaking

The Speaking sub-test is delivered individually and the candidate takes part in two role-plays. In each role-play, the candidate takes his or her professional role (for example, as a nurse or as a

pharmacist) while the interlocutor plays a patient, a client, or a patient's relative or career. For veterinary science, the interlocutor is the owner or career of the animal.

Scoring

For each of the four sub-tests that make up OET, candidates receive a numerical score from 0-500 in 10-point increments e.g. 350,360, 370. The numeric score is mapped to a separate letter grade, ranging from A (highest) to E (lowest). There is no overall grade for OET.

Letter grade	Numeric score	Description of ability
A	450-500	Can communicate very fluently and effectively with patients and health professionals, using appropriate register, tone and lexis. Shows complete understanding of any kind of written or spoken language.
B	350-440	Can communicate effectively with patients and health professionals, using appropriate register, tone and lexis, with only occasional inaccuracies and hesitations. Shows good understanding in a range of clinical contexts.
C+	300-340	Can maintain the interaction in a relevant healthcare environment despite occasional errors and lapses and follow standard spoken language normally encountered in his/her field of specialization.
C	200-290	
D	100-190	Can maintain some interaction and understand straightforward factual information in his/her field of specialization, but may ask for clarification. Frequent errors, inaccuracies and mis- or overuse of technical language can cause strain in communication.
E	0-90	Can manage simple interaction on familiar topics and understand the main point in short, simple messages, provided he/she can ask for clarification. High-density of errors and mis- or overuse of technical language can cause significant strain and breakdowns in communication.

Timing and results

OET is available 14 times per year and can be taken at test venues around the world. A full list is available on the official website.

Results are published online approximately 16 business days after the test. Official statements of results are sent out in the post following the release of online results. There is no overall grade – candidates receive separate grades for each sub-test.

Most recognizing organizations require candidates to have at least a B grade in each of the four sub-tests and recognize results as valid for up to two years. Most recognizing organizations also require

that candidates achieve the requisite grades for each sub-test in one sitting. However, candidates should check with the organization that regulates their profession to confirm current requirements.

Scandals

The Occupational English Test was plagued with criticism from an Australian Government's Parliamentary Enquiry in 2013. The broader community made negative statements about testing conditions and marking consistency to the Enquiry. One submission claimed that it is possible to get a pass by re-sitting the test multiple times as you will eventually be marked higher after 6 sittings of the OET test.

Research

OET is underpinned by over 30 years of research and the test is regularly updated to keep pace with changes in language testing in a healthcare context. There is strong emphasis on the ongoing validity and reliability of the test. Leading language testing academics contribute to the continued development of the test, and subject matter experts are consulted to ensure that tasks are based on a typical workplace situations and the demands of the profession. A full list of research can be seen on the official website

