

## Getting ready for your Cambridge course

St Giles Cambridge courses are designed to fully prepare students for their chosen exam. However, the better your English is before you start, the greater your chances of achieving success. The Cambridge First, Advanced and Proficiency exams are not a grammar test, rather they assess your ability to communicate in English, with a particular focus on reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Set out below are some ideas and activities to help you develop these skills from the comfort of your own home!

### Reading

The best way to improve your reading skills is to read as much as possible, and to read a wide range of different texts. This will also help you in the Writing paper. Try reading:

- novels and short stories
- articles from newspapers and magazines
- informational texts such as travel websites or online encyclopaedias
- reviews of books, films or technology.

If you have a special interest or hobby, try reading about it in English as much as you can. The more you read the better, so set aside maybe half an hour each day and look for things that you enjoy. Try not to stop and use a dictionary every time there is a new word, but be selective, highlighting words that interest you and coming back to them later. Try to be aware of how words are used together to make phrases; this will be really useful in the exam.

### Writing

Although you probably won't have time to do much writing in English before your course starts, there are still things that you can do to improve. When you are reading, it can be really useful to think about the choices that the writer has made, particularly in the areas in which your writing will be marked. In the exam your writing will be assessed under four criteria:

**Content**, which focuses on how well you have completed the task, in other words, if you have done what you were asked to do.

**Communicative Achievement**, which focuses on how appropriate the writing is for the task (for example, is the style right for a magazine article?), and whether you have used the right register, for example formal or informal.

**Organisation**, which focuses on the way you put together the piece of writing, in other words, if ideas are developed and clearly linked together.

**Language**, which focuses on vocabulary and grammar. This includes the range of language as well as how accurate it is.

When you are reading, look out for these features. What style is the writer using and how do they create this style? How does the writer organise and link ideas? What words and structures do they use? If you are reading a range of different texts, you can start to get a feel for the different ways that language can be used, and this will all be a big help when you start writing for your course.

## Listening

Try to listen to as many different things as possible. There's a huge range of recordings and videos on the internet, such as video clips, podcasts, talks, TV channels, radio stations and also websites specially designed for English-language learners. As with reading, if you have an interest or hobby, try to find video clips or podcasts about it. Just as for reading, don't worry about understanding every word, try to understand the general idea, and then listen again for more detail. Taking notes as you listen can be a useful activity.

## Speaking

Speak English as much as possible! Like all language skills, your speaking will improve if you practise more. Speak to different people, in different situations and about different topics. If you don't have much opportunity to speak English to other people it can help to practice on your own. Why not spend a few minutes each evening simply telling yourself about your day? You could try recording yourself, and listening back to see what you could improve. Have fun with it – try speaking more quickly and then more slowly. Try using new words and structures. How about playing a role? Try speaking like a famous person – how would James Bond say that? What about the Queen? When you are listening, think about pronunciation – how do people use stress and intonation to express meaning? Try listening and then copying what you hear.

## Grammar and vocabulary

While you shouldn't try to learn every new word and structure that you read or hear, reading and listening are both great opportunities to improve your grammar and vocabulary.

Be selective – choose words or phrases that you like or ones that you notice lots of times. Using an English / English dictionary, rather than one that translates into your own language is a good idea. Think about how and where a word is used and what other words are used with it.

Doing lots of reading will help improve your grammar, but if you feel that you need to do some extra work, the book **English Grammar in Use** by Raymond Murphy will give you a good foundation at B1 level and is now available as an App. If you want to go further, **Advanced Grammar in Use** by Martin Hewings is a useful book and is also available as an App.

**Get started with some great reading and listening resources:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news>

<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/>

<https://www.ted.com/talks>

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk>

Information adapted from 'Cambridge Information for Candidates'. Full version available on the Cambridge English Website.