



ENGLISH LANGUAGE
COMPETENCE

Department of English / University of Vienna

Common Final Test (CFT)

Test Specifications

July 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

This document gives a general overview of the aims and content of the Common Final Test (CFT). All students enrolled at the Department of English and American Studies take the CFT at the end of the “Integrated Language and Study Skills” module (BA program) or the “Foundations of English Language Competence” module (BEd program).

2. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The main purpose of the CFT is to assess whether students have sufficient reading and writing ability in English to communicate effectively in academic contexts. This includes:

- text comprehension (text types include informative and argumentative texts)
- production of well-organized and stylistically appropriate argumentative texts
- application of academically relevant skills (e.g., processing text content, quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing)
- language proficiency at B2+/C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The CFT is designed to create a positive washback effect on the teaching and learning processes in departmental language courses in terms of content, assessment, and links between courses.

3. TEST TAKER

The CFT will be taken by all students at the end of the second semester of the “Integrated Language and Study Skills” / “Foundations of English Language Competence” module at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna.

4. TEST LEVEL

Student performances are expected to be in the range of B2+ and C1 according to the CEFR.

5. CONSTRUCT

The CFT **writing task** tests the candidates’ ability to present a reasoned and well-structured argument, to provide relevant support and examples, and to use varied, appropriate, and accurate language.

Candidates are being assessed on their ability to:

- present and justify an opinion
- support an argument
 - based on their own knowledge and experience
 - by selecting relevant evidence/information from two input texts
 - by comparing/contrasting/juxtaposing/evaluating/reframing/rebutting information/viewpoints
- summarize, paraphrase, synthesize, and cite various sources
- develop ideas logically and use organizational patterns effectively (e.g., paragraphing, information structure, signposting) to produce a cohesive and coherent text
- use a range of linguistic resources appropriately and accurately

The CFT **reading tasks** test the candidates' ability to:

- skim and scan a text to locate specific information
- understand main idea(s) and supporting details
- understand linking sentences and ideas
- infer meaning from context
- deduce meaning of unfamiliar lexical items
- distinguish between fact and opinion
- adapt reading speed to task

6. CONTENT & STRUCTURE

The CFT consists of two parts: a reading and a writing section.

The reading part consists of two reading texts of fairly equal length (approximately 800-900 words each). Texts are used in their original/authentic form and shortened where necessary. Students have 35 minutes to answer approximately 25 items. Task types include multiple choice, short answer questions, sentence completion, gapped summaries, table/flow chart or diagram completion, choosing paragraph headings, choosing text titles, identifying the writer's views, and matching. Texts include articles from newspapers, textbooks, magazines, and journals and are formal, written for a non-specialist audience.

For the writing section, students are required to produce an argumentative essay of 300 to 400 words in 85 minutes. They present a reasoned argument, based on their personal opinion and supported with references to the two reading texts.

7. ADMINISTRATION

7.1 Operational phase

Both parts will take place on site on the same day. Students will have 35 minutes for the reading part. The writing part will last 85 minutes, and students will be given an additional 5 minutes to upload/hand in their essays. Dictionaries are not allowed at any time during the test.

7.2 Rating phase

Students' papers are distributed randomly among lecturers. No lecturer marks their own students' work or that of students they may know from previous semesters. Raters independently mark the reading answer sheets (using the scoring key) and the scripts (using the analytic writing assessment scales). Performances below the cut score will be second marked and ratings will be averaged. In cases of a considerable discrepancy between the two ratings, the performances will be rated a third time.

8. ASSESSMENT

8.1 Common Final Test (CFT)

Reading: objective; one point for each item
The reading part accounts for 50% of the overall CFT score.

Writing: analytic marking based on the following criteria: task fulfilment, organization, linguistic accuracy, linguistic range, punctuation, spelling, and length
The writing part accounts for 50% of the overall CFT score.

The reading and writing sections will be graded separately; 60% of the overall CFT score is required for a pass grade.

A score below 48% on either of the two parts (reading or writing) will result in a fail grade.

8.2 Rating Scale

1) Task Fulfilment **5 points**

5 points	All salient points contained in the prompt are cogently elaborated. The student • gives a well-founded personal opinion, which extends beyond ideas provided in the sources, and presents a logically developed argument. • selects relevant evidence/information from both sources, integrating it effectively into the overall argument to support the student's own points. • has critically engaged with the source(s) by effectively comparing/contrasting/juxtaposing/evaluating/reframing/rebutting information/viewpoints. All formal text type requirements are met (citation, paraphrase, formatting, etc.).
4 points	All salient points contained in the prompt are elaborated. The student • gives a well-founded personal opinion and presents a logically developed argument. • selects relevant evidence/information from both sources, integrating it into the overall argument to support the student's own points. • has attempted to critically engage with the source(s) by comparing/contrasting/juxtaposing/evaluating/reframing/rebutting information/viewpoints. • may have misrepresented some minor points in the sources. Formal text type requirements are largely met (citation, paraphrase, formatting, etc.).
3 points	All salient points contained in the prompt are addressed. The student • is, to a fair degree, able to present an argument and give a personal opinion, but the arguments are sometimes not sufficiently supported by evidence or examples AND/OR there are minor logical flaws. • relies heavily on sources rather than using them selectively OR does not always integrate them into the student's own argument. • has misrepresented some points in the sources although the reader would still get the correct general idea. Formal text type requirements are partly met (citation, paraphrase, formatting, etc.).
2 points	Not all salient points in the prompt are addressed (e.g., reference to only one source, a central aspect of the prompt ignored). The student • does not clearly state their own opinion. • presents arguments, but supporting evidence and examples are of questionable relevance AND/OR there are significant logical flaws. • has misrepresented key points in the sources, so the reader gets a wrong impression. Formal text type requirements are not met.
1 point	The student has misunderstood the task. The student • presents a limited number and range of arguments, which are not supported by evidence or examples, AND/OR logical development is barely discernible. • does not refer to the sources.
0 points	The student has completely misunderstood the task.

2) Organization 5 points

5 points	The text has an effective structure (i.e., a clearly contextualized introduction, unified body paragraphs, and a conclusion recapping major points); the text is fully cohesive and coherent. The thesis statement and topic sentences are clear and precise. A variety of cohesive devices are used effectively between and within paragraphs. Logical relations between sentences and the overall method of development (e.g., cause & effect, comparison, exemplification, etc.) are indicated by the appropriate use of lexis, pronouns, conjunctions, and discourse markers.
4 points	The text has an effective structure (i.e., a clearly contextualized introduction, unified body paragraphs, and a conclusion recapping major points); the text is largely cohesive and coherent. The thesis statement and topic sentences are clear. An appropriate range of cohesive devices is used. There are occasional problems with pronoun reference.
3 points	The text is organized into appropriately structured but not entirely effective paragraphs (e.g., an insufficient contextualization in the introduction, not fully unified body paragraphs, a conclusion that does not recap major points). The thesis statement and/or topic sentences are not entirely clear/successful. Cohesive devices are not always appropriate. There are several problems with pronoun reference.
2 points	The text is organized into paragraphs on the surface level (layout) but has an unsuccessful introduction (e.g., no thesis statement, the main focus not addressed in contextualization, etc.) and/or conclusion (e.g., an introduction of new ideas, no relation to body paragraphs, etc.). Body paragraphs are not unified and/or lack topic sentences. Cohesive devices are frequently inappropriate.
1 point	There are some paragraphs, but there is no introduction or conclusion. The textual development is difficult to follow. There is little or no use of cohesive devices beyond very basic coordinators (e.g., <i>and</i> / <i>but</i>).
0 points	The text is not organized into paragraphs, and there is no apparent structure.

3) Linguistic Accuracy 5 points

5 points	The text is virtually free of mistakes.
4 points	The text consistently maintains a high degree of accuracy, with only occasional slips.
3 points	The text shows a relatively high degree of linguistic control. There are several mistakes, but they do not cause misunderstanding.
2 points	Multiple linguistic choices are not satisfactory for the task; some of these may impede understanding or strain readers, forcing them to pause.
1 point	There are frequent/repeated errors in the text; some of these may impede understanding of whole passages.
0 points	There are basic and consistent patterns of error in the text. The student has a very poor grasp of the language required for the task.

4) Linguistic Range 5 points

5 points	The student demonstrates a very broad range of language to formulate thoughts precisely, give emphasis, and eliminate ambiguity. The student can paraphrase effectively and convey finer shades of meaning (e.g., by using a wide range of qualifying devices and showing awareness of connotative levels). The text is consistently appropriate in style and register.
4 points	The student has a good command of a broad range of language as required for the task. There are no signs of the student having to restrict what they want to say, although occasional lexical choices may be imprecise/unidiomatic. The student can paraphrase effectively and qualify arguments (in relation to degrees of, for example, certainty/uncertainty, belief/doubt, likelihood), although there is occasional repetition. The text is appropriate in style and register, with only isolated minor slips.
3 points	The student uses a sufficient range of language required for the task, although some lexical limitations cause circumlocution and imprecision. Little use of paraphrasing leads to some repetition. The text is generally appropriate in style and register, with a few deviations.
2 points	The student uses a limited range of language; lexical choices are frequently imprecise. Absence of paraphrasing leads to frequent repetition. Parts of the text are inappropriate in style and register.
1 point	The student has a very narrow range of language at their disposal, which makes it difficult for them to formulate clear arguments. The text relies heavily on repetition. The text is inappropriate in style and register.
0 points	The student's use of language is severely restricted.

5) Punctuation 2 points

2 points	The student uses a range of punctuation marks accurately and effectively to convey finer shades of meaning.
1 point	The student has a solid grasp of the most common conventions in punctuation with minor inaccuracies.
0 points	The student has a poor grasp of the conventions in punctuation.

6) Spelling 2 points

2 points	The spelling is completely accurate (possible 2 errors).
1 point	The text shows some inaccuracies in spelling (possible 3–6 errors).
0 points	There are many spelling inaccuracies in the text (more than 6 errors).

7) Length 1 point

1 point	Length appropriate (300–400 words)
0 points	0–299 or > 400 words

8.3 Writing Score: Percentages and Grades

25	100%	Sehr gut (1)
24	96%	
23	92%	
22	88%	Gut (2)
21	84%	
20	80%	
19	76%	Befriedigend (3)
18	72%	
17	68%	Genügend (4)
16	64%	
15	60%	
14	56%	Nicht genügend (5)
13	52%	
12	48%	
11	44%	
10	40%	
9	36%	
8	32%	
7	28%	
6	24%	
5	20%	
4	16%	
3	12%	
2	8%	
1	4%	
0	0%	