Pearson

Designing and Aligning a new Computer-based English Language test for Canada to the CLB

PTE Core: A Case Study

Dr. Rose Clesham
Languages Canada
March 2024

What is PTE Core?

PTE Core is a **computer-based language test** that measures **everyday English skills** through a range of day-to-day life and work-based tasks.

PTE Core provides secure proof of a person's everyday English skills for work and migration purposes.

Pearson

The PTE portfolio

Pearson | PTE

PTE Academic

The "original" 4-skills test measuring Academic English

Pearson
PTE Academic

Pearson
PTE Academic ONLINE

Pearson
PTE Academic UKVI

PTE Core

A 4-skills PTE test, measuring general English skills.

Pearson
PTE Core

PTE Home

A 2 skills general English test

Pearson
PTE Home A1

Pearson
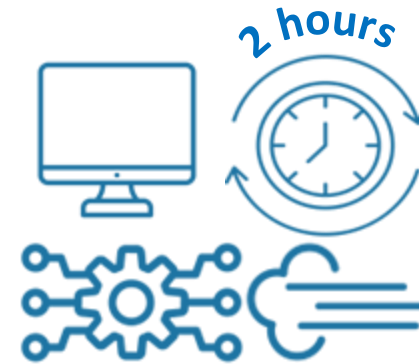PTE Home A2

Pearson
PTE Home B1

Pearson

PTE Core: The Design

A **general** 4-skills English test

Content includes **everyday life** and **workplace scenarios**

2 hours

A test that is focused on **non-academic** use of English

Accepted by the Canadian government (IRCC) for **all work and migration visas**.

Pearson

How does PTE Core compare?

PTE Core

PTE Core tests **general English** through tasks related to every day life and workplace scenarios.

PTE Academic

PTE Academic tests **academic English** with tasks related to study and professional skills.

Skills assessed

4 skills:
speaking, writing, reading and listening.
Integrated skills testing.

4 skills:
speaking, writing, reading and listening.
Integrated skills testing.

Test content

General content relevant to every day life, workplaces and some study situations (non-academic). Content covers subjects that would be familiar to everyone.

Authentic source content such as videos/podcasts on the internet, announcements, automated telephone helplines, work meetings, and broadcasts.

Academic content relevant to study and professional situations such as university lectures, interviews, and academic articles.

Authentic source content such as reading and audio texts from books and articles covering broad topics such as social sciences, humanities, business, technology, and health & medicine.

Four Key PTE Design Features

Convenient

- Single **2-hour** test.
- Fast: results within **48 hours**.
- Testing **365** days/year.
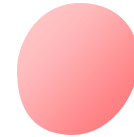- **Simple online booking**, up to 24 hours in advance.

Accurate & Objective

- Computer-based marking **ensures impartial, accurate marks**.
- A granular scoring scale from **10 – 90** to pinpoint a test taker's performance.

Relevant

- Test topics relate to **everyday life situations**.
- **Integrated tasks** asses more than one language skill at a time reflecting the combination of skills every English speaker needs.

Enhanced security

- Advanced **multi-layer security** measures.
- Completely **digital end-to-end** test providing greater security.
- Confidence in results.

Initial Assessment Design and Item writing and development

Feedback from Canadian Test Review Group

Feedback from Canadian test takers

Initial mapping exercise by Canadian experts to map items to the CLB

Review/Amendment of Items

Creation of balanced test forms to agreed blueprint

Large Scale Field test and item and test analyses

Standard Setting to Align PTE Core test score outcomes to CLB + follow-up verification

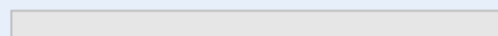**PTE Core:**

A Two-Year Assessment Validity Journey
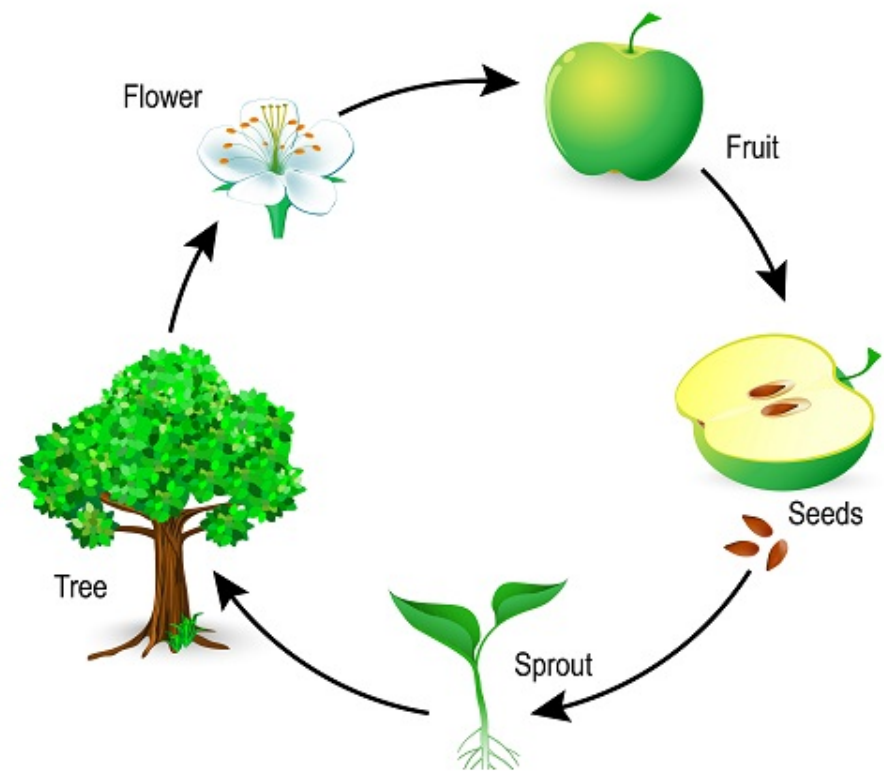
Pearson

Read Aloud

Recorded Answer

Current Status:
Beginning in 29 seconds.

The best time to visit Canada is during the fall months, from September through November. The weather has cooled down but is still comfortable, the summer crowds have left, prices drop, and the leaves on the trees have beautiful colours.

Describe Image

LIFE CYCLE OF AN APPLE TREE

Flower

Fruit

Seeds

Sprout

Tree

Recorded Answer

Current Status:
Beginning in 23 seconds.

End Exam   Previous   Navigator   Next

Speaking Situations

You're applying for a new job. You would like your current co-worker, Alex, to be a reference for you because the two of you have worked together for a long time and she knows your skills and abilities well. What would you say to Alex?
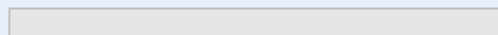
Status: Beginning in 13 seconds.

Volume

Recorded Answer

Current Status:
Beginning in 51 seconds.

Reading: Summary writing

Summarize the passage below from a website about libraries in Canada for a social media post. [25 and 50 words]

Most communities have public libraries where you can borrow books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and eBooks. Public libraries are free to use. You need a library card to borrow books or other items. You can apply for a card at your local library. Bring some identification (ID) with your name and address on it. You can also borrow books from other public libraries in British Columbia (B.C.) with your local library card and ID.

Libraries have books for adults and children. Many libraries also have books, magazines, and newspapers in different languages, and English books that are easy to read. Library staff can help you find information on almost any topic. Libraries also have computers you can use to find information or send e-mail. Many libraries have special services for people with disabilities-for example, a library may have talking books for blind people. You can reserve or renew books from home on the library website.

Most libraries have activities for children, such as storytelling, reading programs, and crafts. Libraries may also offer workshops and lectures for adults.

Cut	Copy	Paste

Total Word Count: 0

Email Writing

Susan has asked you to go to a movie with her on Tuesday evening. Write an email to Susan explaining that you can't go. [100 words]

Your response must come from the following three themes:

- thank her for her invitation

- apologize for not being able to go

- suggest another time to go

You should include all three themes. Provide supporting ideas for each theme.

Cut	Copy	Paste

Total Word Count: 0

PTE Migrate TRG Test 1 - Candidate Name

Gap Fill Reading and Writing

Read the text below from a recommendation letter. Choose the correct words to complete the text.

Dear Ms Ramirez

I am pleased to write a recommendation letter for David Paterson, who has been an assistant in my toy store for the past three years. David has been an honest and responsible [employee ⌄] for the three years that he has worked for me. I can always [rely ⌄] on him to work hard in the shop. When I am not in the store, I never hesitate to leave him in charge.

He comes to the shop in the afternoon after school. He has always been punctual and if there are times that he is running late or could not come to work, he always lets me [know ⌄] ahead of time. He is excellent with the customers, and I never had any complaints against him. I recommend him [highly ⌄] to any employer. I would be happy to answer any questions about him.

Sincerely,

Ken Lowe

Multiple Answer Multiple Choice Reading

Read the text from a job advertisement.

DRIVER WANTED, HIRING IMMEDIATELY

Job description: driving a company car as required, between branches in Canada and occasionally in the United States

This position requires a responsible person with the following:
- a valid Canadian driving licence
- a valid passport and be able to cross over in the United States for training
- driving experience, such as delivery driver, Uber, taxi, etc
- availability to work in locations out of town
- no speeding tickets or fines

We provide:
- Paid training is 2 days starting immediately!!!
- Food expenses for out of province trips are also included
- Hotel expenses are covered
- Hours are full-time (approx. 8-10 hours per day)
- Company car and gas costs are covered
- Weekly pay every Friday (salary: $17.00 /hour)
- 4% Vacation Pay included
- Permanent hire with benefits is possible upon job performance (to be discussed after two months)
- Traveling to the United States for 2 days for paid training

Select all the correct answers.

What does this employer offer?

☐ the possibility of part-time work

☐ four weeks of holiday per year

☐ paid meals when traveling

☐ a free course in Canada

☐ fuel for the work vehicle

PTE Migrate TRG Test 1 - Candidate Name

Reorder Paragraphs

Reorder the sentences in this paragraph on persuasion.

Source

Target

Instead, they have to be persuaded and helped to feel comfortable about the outcome that is eventually agreed.

The reason that resolution doesn't come quickly is that achieving agreement requires people to accept the reality of views different from their own and to accept compromise.

People need time to make this adjustment in attitude.

There is a tendency to underestimate how long it takes to resolve an issue on which two people initially have different views.

It is not just a matter of putting forward facts and expecting the other person immediately to accept the logic of the position.

End Exam   Previous   Navigator   Next

Listening: Summary Writing

Listen to a short talk about health and write a summary. [20 and 30 words]

Status: Beginning in 10 seconds.

Volume

Cut

Copy

Paste

Total Word Count: 0

End Exam   Previous   Navigator   Next

*TRANSCRIPT*If you take care of seniors, older people in your community, you might be wondering, what are the foods that they should be eating? Well, I'm here to help you with a couple of healthy eating tips for the older folks. First, make sure they eat a well-rounded diet. It should include all food groups, things made from grains, like bread and rice. Half of them should be whole grains. They also need to get different types of fruits and vegetables. The fruits and vegetables should be of all different colors, especially those orange and red ones, like oranges, apples, and tomatoes, they've got a lot of vitamin A. For meat, be sure to choose healthier meats with low amounts of fat, chicken is good, and beef is ok sometimes, but really, chicken is best. So, when choosing foods for older members of your community, make sure they eat the right breads, meats, fruits and vegetables.

Pearson

What type of Feedback did we ask for?

Questions included:

- Were the question contexts appropriate?
- Were the task types appropriate
- What CLB levels were items targeting?
- Was the language used appropriate and unambiguous?
- Were the test items and instructions user friendly?
- Was the test appropriate for Canadian migration purposes?

Pearson

PTE Core:

Test Format

Test timing

Overall testing time – approximately 2hrs

Part	Content	Minutes
Pre-test	Technical check	Not timed
Part 1	**Speaking & Writing**	46–67 Minutes
Part 2	**Reading**	27–38 minutes
Part 3	**Listening**	30–37 minutes

Test structure

Part	Minutes	Minutes
Pre - test	Technical check	Not timed
Part 1: **Speaking & Writing**	• Personal Introduction • Read aloud (6–7) • Repeat sentence (10–12) • Describe image (3–4) • Respond to a situation (2–4) **(new)** • Answer short question (5–6) • Summarize written text (1–2) • Write email (2–3) **(new)**	46 - 67 minutes
Part 2: **Reading**	• Fill in the blanks (R&W) (5–6) • Multiple choice, choose multiple answers (1–2) • Reorder paragraph (2–3) • Fill in the blanks (R) (4–5) • Multiple choice, choose single answer (1–2)	27 - 38 minutes
Part 3: **Listening**	• Summarize spoken text (1–2) • Multiple choice, choose multiple answers (1–2) • Fill in the blanks (2–3) • Multiple choice, choose single answer (1–2) • Select missing word (1–2) • Highlight incorrect words (1–2) • Write from dictation (3–4)	30 - 37 minutes

We used established Standard Setting methodologies:
Using:

- A panel of 14 independent judges
- A familiarisation process
- 4 separate activities- one for each language skill
- An item–centred modified Angoff method was used for receptive skills
- A test-taker modified Analytic judgement method was used for productive skills

Training, Familiarisation and Standardization
This phase was required:

- To familiarize judges with the standard setting procedures
- To familiarize judges with the PTE Core test purpose and structure, with particular emphasis on the item types used in the standard setting activities
- To standardize judges' understanding of CLB proficiency levels
- To provide judges practice in applying CLB descriptors to exemplar items and performances.

The Receptive Skill Modified Angoff Method

Item centred for listening and reading items:

Judges were asked to identify which CLB level a test taker would need to be in order for the probability of success to be 50% for each item

This concept can be difficult to conceptualise and so a large part of the training was given to discuss this concept and develop a group understanding and application

The Productive Skill Modified Angoff Method

Test-taker centred approach for Speaking and writing skills

- Speaking and Writing skills considered separately

- Judges were asked to make holistic judgements of a test taker's CLB level based on the longer writing and speaking items from the Field Test

Materials used

Activity	Item type	Description	Number of items
Listening	209-LL-SAMC	Single Answer Multiple Choice Listening	5
	210-LL-MAMC	Multiple Answer Multiple Choice Listening	5
	211-LL-GAPS	Gap Fill Listening	5
	212-LR-HOTS	Highlighting Incorrect Words	5
Reading	201-RR-SAMC	Single Answer Multiple Choice Reading	4
	202-RR-MAMC	Multiple Answer Multiple Choice Reading	4
	205-RR-GAPS	Gap Fill Reading	6
	218-RW-GAPS	Gap Fill Reading and Writing	6

Activity	Item type	Description	Number per test taker
Speaking	219-SS-DESC	Describe Image	2
	223-SS-SITU	Speaking Situations	2
Writing	215-LW-SUMM	Listening Summary Writing	1
	222-WW-EMAI	Email Writing	2
	208-RW-SUMM	Reading Summary Writing	1

Data Cleaning and Analysis

Following Round 2, the data were prepared for analysis. Drawing on prior PTE and CLB alignment research, three criteria were applied to clean the data (Jones et al., 2017).

- Remove any **ratings** more than 1.5 levels from the average rating for an item. A total of 5.54% of ratings were removed.

- Remove any **judges** whose correlation with the average of all judges is less than 0.5. No judges had correlations below 0.50, so no judges were removed.

- Remove any **items** with low certainty. Items are considered to have low certainty when the maximum proportion of judges rating in any two adjacent categories is less than 70%. A total of 3.75% of items were removed.

Judge Agreement Data

Skill	Round	Mean Rating	Mean SD	Mean SEJ	Low certainty (n)
Listening	Round 1	5.83	1.32	0.35	11
	Round 2	5.66	0.88	0.23	6
	Final	5.60	0.72	0.20	0
Reading	Round 1	5.80	1.18	0.32	11
	Round 2	5.70	0.78	0.21	1
	Final	5.63	0.61	0.17	0
Speaking	Round 1	5.45	1.10	0.30	7
	Round 2	5.35	0.78	0.21	2
	Final	5.34	0.59	0.16	0
Writing	Round 1	4.96	1.11	0.30	9
	Round 2	4.90	0.69	0.18	0
	Clean	4.84	0.58	0.16	0

Alignment Table

The table below shows the PTE Score scores calculated for each CLB level using linear regression

CLB	PTE Core Listening	PTE Core Reading	PTE Core Speaking	PTE Core Writing
10	89–90	88–90	89–90	90
9	82–88	78–87	84–88	88–89
8	71–81	69–77	76–83	79–87
7	60–70	60–68	68–75	69–78
6	50–59	51–59	59–67	60–68
5	39–49	42–50	51–58	51–59
4	28–38	33–41	42–50	41–50
3	18–27	24–32	34–41	32–40

Score requirements & alignment

1

IRCC Score Requirements

For visa purposes, the IRCC requires skills scores, not the overall score (visa requirement will be for a CLB score across some or all skills.)

2

Alignment table

PTE Core scores are aligned to the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

PTE has carried out research and alignment across the four skills

3

Other test comparisons

Further research to be completed to provide concordance with other language tests and scales such as IETLS General, CELPIP and the CEFR.

Canadian Language Benchmarks Scale of Ability											
Basic				Intermediate				Advanced			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Pearson

Verification and next steps

- The PTE Core- CLB Alignments, based on Field Test data were verified in a separate activity in July 2022

- This alignment will undergo further verification once a large and representative data-set on the live operational test becomes available

- Concordance of The PTE core test with other tests and other language frameworks will also be carried out as soon as possible

- The full Alignment report and summary can be found on the PTE Research site.

Thank you

rose.clesham@pearson.com